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June 30, 1896.

No. 988.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXVIII.



THERE HE STOOD GAZING AT THE PROSTRATE FORM OF BUFFALO BILL.

OR,
**SHADOW SAM'S
SHORT-STOP.**

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUTHWEST.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BUFFALO BILL'S SILVER STAR PARDS.
"WELL, boy pards, we go different trails
from here, for you return to your homes in
Meadowland Valley, while I—"

"My God, Buffalo Bill, I have no home."

"Ah, my poor young pard, I spoke without thinking, just then. I forgot all that the renegade outlaws had made you suffer—your parents, little brother and all on your ranch wiped out utterly and home burned, you being left all alone; but I heard your vow of vengeance when my trail led me to where you knelt in the midst of your dead, and faithfully has it been kept, for yonder new graves are where those murderers lie; you and our redskin ally have wiped out the band, for I believe that not more than two escaped. Those dear to you have been avenged."

"Yes, sir, avenged, and through your aid; for had it not been for the coming of the Lone Buffalo, whom you sent here, and then your own self, coming to our rescue, those who killed my parents and burned my home would have ended us—my four comrades and me, and the Silver Star Five would have been no more."

"We owe all to you, Mr. Cody, for you told us they were white men disguised as Indians, and not real redskins, and you sent us on their trail—yes, we owe all to you, and our lives as well, do we not, boys?"

"Yes, indeed, we do!"

"Well, boys, I hope to meet you some day again, when duty calls me down here into New Mexico—which it seldom does, however."

"I have found you as brave a lot of young bordermen as I ever met, and shall ever remember you as my Allies of the Silver Star."

"And if we need you again may we call on you, sir?"

"Yes; will you come and help us, if we need you?" came in a chorus of voices.

After a slight hesitation Buffalo Bill answered:

"Yes; though you know, as chief of scouts up at Fort Lyon, my time is not my own; but if you really need me, send the Redskin Hermit after me, or one of you come for me, and I will return and do what I can for you, boys."

A cheer broke from the lips of the five youths, and the one who had had such a terrible wrong to avenge said:

"We thank you, sir, for I have a foreboding of evil still to come, that we will need you again, and we will strive hard to make ourselves all that your followers should be."

"I believe that, but you are already away up as dead-shots, wild riders and lasso throwers, and are as daring a band as I could wish for to help me out in a death struggle."

"Yes, I will come when you really need me, my Knights of the Silver Star; so now go to your homes. You, Bird Bainbridge, must not live sorrowing over the past, but build up for the future, for a long and useful life is before you; you have it in you to make a name, so don't fail to make it."

"Good-by, all!" and with a firm grasp of the hand all round, Buffalo Bill leaped into his saddle and rode away, calling back to a tall Indian wearing the bonnet of a chief, and standing near the group:

"Lone Buffalo, keep your eye on my Boy Pard!"

"Lone Buffalo remember," was the laconic response. A few moments later the great scout had disappeared in the timber fringing the banks of the Little Colorado River.

The scene lay upon a ridge looking into a valley where ran the Little Colorado, just before crossing the boundary line from New Mexico into Arizona, and far to the southward of Fort Wingate.

Upon the ridge were a pile of rocks which man had fashioned into a small fort, and within it lay the whitened bones of a score of human beings, who, long before, had met their death there, though no one had lived to tell the tale.

In that little barrier of rocks, which had become the tomb of its defenders, five youths had stood at bay fighting big odds for days, and with no hope of rescue, until an unseen ally in the Lone Buffalo, a Tonca chief, had come upon the scene, followed soon after by Buffalo Bill, and then the renegade besiegers had met their doom, save several who had escaped on foot, and their crime against their own race, a week before, had been avenged.

There were five youths in the group of those whom Buffalo Bill had called his Pards of the Silver Star.

They were well along in their teens, daring-faced young fellows, all well built and as active as cats.

Dressed in corduroy pants stuck in top boots, blue flannel shirts and gray sombreros, and well armed, they presented a picturesque appearance.

Looping up their hats on one side was a large silver five-pointed star, and altogether they were a splendid-looking band, ready to do and dare any deed where duty called them.

Their homes were in Meadowland Valley, two days' journey distant, for thus far had they tracked the Renegade Raiders, recovering the booty taken from the pillaged ranches, and the horses also. Of the valley and its thirty ranches they were the self-constituted guard, or patrol, and it was while they were away on a hunt that the outlaws slipped in and laid in ashes one home, the one at the head of the valley, and the finest.

That was the home, too, of the young leader of the five, Bird Bainbridge, and he had been left to mourn all his loved ones slain.

Carrying dispatches along the string of forts to Fort McRae, Buffalo Bill had happened upon the scene of death and ruin soon after the raiders had been there, and thus had been drawn into alliance with the Boy Pards, and had sent them on the trail of the renegades, while he went on to the post, and then followed after the young avengers.

The Lone Buffalo was a Tonca chief, an outcast from his tribe on account of friendly acts shown the palefaces, and, dwelling alone in the mountains, he was known as the Redskin Hermit.

Known to Buffalo Bill, whom he had served well, and received favors in return, he had been his ally on the avenging trail. The Tonca was now going to return to his mountain retreat, while the scout went back to his post in the northwest, and the young rangers took the trail to the valley where they dwelt.

"Boys, we must first do a duty to those dead, bury them in the little fort, even though their bones have been bleaching there for months," said Bird Bainbridge, after the scout had ridden away, and the Hermit Redskin had started for his lone retreat.

This duty to the dead the boys gladly did; then the march was taken up for Meadowland Valley, the pack animals, with the recaptured booty, and the other animals being driven on ahead on the long trail homeward.

CHAPTER II. SHADOW SAM.

It was months after the destruction of Bonaventure Ranch, the home of the Bainbridges, and time had softened the bitter grief of the brave boy who was the last of his race.

The kind settlers had erected, almost amid the ruins of his former home, and within view of the graves of his beloved dead, a comfortable cabin for him, and there he dwelt alone, tilling his garden, herding his cattle and ponies, of which he had a considerable number. His land was the nearest ranch to the Indian country, and to the trails that lawless men frequented. The homestead, therefore, acted as a guard to the others in the settlement.

His four pards, sons of well-to-do settlers down the valley, were wont to visit him every day, and the five would go off on scouts beyond the valley, hunt, fish and keep an eye out for any danger that might threaten the ranchers, either from outlaw raiders or prowling bands of redskins.

The banded five would practice with the lasso, the bow and arrow, riding, and with rifle and revolver, to become experts in the use of all weapons and inure themselves to hardships, so that they would be ready to meet any danger or duty which might come.

Their part in the wiping out of the raiders had been highly extolled by all in the valley, and, boys though they were in years, all in the settlement felt perfect confidence in them, for surely they had proven themselves men by their deeds.

Seated in front of his cabin one afternoon, cleaning his weapons, which he always kept in perfect order, Bird Bainbridge looked up as he heard the sound of hoofs.

"One of the boys," he inferred.

But instead of one of his pards there rode into view a horseman whom he did not know.

He was clad in buckskin, wore boots and a slouch hat, was well armed and splendidly mounted.

Coming straight toward the cabin, this rider saw the young rancher, rifle in hand, and at once raised his hands above his head as a token that he came on an errand of peace.

Bird Bainbridge calmly awaited his approach, rose as he drew near, and said, as he eyed the man fixedly:

"Well, pard, how are you?"

"O. K., if you are the young feller as is known as Bird Bainbridge," was the answer.

"That is my name."

"Well, you look it, from what I has heard of yer, fer if yer hain't a young daredevil then I'm clean off ther trail."

The man seemed honest in his peculiar admiration of the youth, who smiled at his quaint way of expressing it and said:

"Won't you introduce yourself now, sir?"

"Well, I hed better, I guesses, but yer won't be much better acquainted when yer knows my name, which is Shadow Sam, for so ther boys calls me, as I is so all-fired thin, though don't take it by that thet I am sickly, fer I hain't, as I'm tougher than a pine knot."

"Well, Mr. Shadow Sam, won't you get down and have supper, for it is about time I was getting it ready?"

"Thankee; it's jist what I'll do, and glad of it."

"So you be ther cap'n of ther boy band o' scouts thet I has heard Buffalo Bill speak of?"

"Buffalo Bill! Oh, do you know him, sir?" cried the youth, excitedly.

"Well I does, fer he's ther chief o' army scouts, of the which I is one."

"I am so glad to meet you, for any friend of Buffalo Bill is a friend of mine!" and Bird Bainbridge held out his hand to the frontiersman.

Instantly the man grasped it in a grip of iron, and as he did so he drew a re-

volver from his belt, and, covering the youth, said, savagely:

"Now I has got yer whar I wants yer, youngster, and it's death to yer ter blink an eye."

With all his quickness and nerve, the boy was fairly caught and he knew it.

He had trusted a stranger too far.

His belt of arms hung on a nail on the cabin, his rifle was behind him and ten feet away, and the man's weapon was cocked, his finger on the trigger and the muzzle not six inches from his face and looking him straight in the eyes.

In the face of the stranger Bird Bainbridge saw only deep cunning and wickedness.

He had the look of a man, now that he was not playing a part, who would dare any danger in a bad cause, and the glitter in his eye was malignant in the extreme.

But the youth was not cowed, though he was taken aback by the change of front in his visitor.

He did not lose his nerve, notwithstanding his danger, and the thought flashed quickly across his mind that the man was one of the three or four of the raiders' band that he and his four comrades, with Buffalo Bill and the Lone Buffalo, had so nearly wiped out upon the Little Colorado River.

This thought gave him strength to meet what was before him, for if the fellow was one of that band, seeking to avenge his comrades, he was, then, none other than one of the murderers of his parents, his little brother and the others on the ranch on that fatal night five months before.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE REVOLVER'S MUZZLE.

"You have got me foul, stranger, and no mistake."

The cool utterance of the youth, under such perilous and trying circumstances, quite nonplussed the man with the revolver.

He wondered if there might not be others near, and if he had not made a sad mistake in not first looking about him before he made the break that he had.

It was hard for him to believe that the mere boy could face a deadly danger with such utter calmness, almost indifference at his fate.

"Well, you is a cool one," he said, with real admiration for such nerve.

"What's the use of worrying over what can't be helped? You've got me covered, so now what is your game, for I don't care how soon you show your hand. I want to know what's up."

The man gazed straight into the eyes of the young rancher.

There was no flinching there, and they met his own without qualling.

"I'll tell you what's up," he muttered.

"You can't do so any too quick for me."

"But fust, let me say if yer has any of yer pards near ter shout fer, ther very fust motion yer makes ter act or call, I'll pull trigger, and yer'll be in condition ter sleep over yonder whar yer parents and ther rest of 'em is."

This remark drove every particle of blood out of the face of Bird Bainbridge.

It was pale before, and no wonder, but now it became livid.

But not with fear. Fear was foreign to his nature; but the words of the man betrayed him—proved that he knew his parents were buried there on the banks of the creek, where a few white crosses marked their resting place.

To know this, the stranger could be none other than one of the three who es-

caped the fate of their comrades on the Little Colorado.

Bird Bainbridge therefore stood in the presence of a man whom he had vowed to bring to justice, to fulfill his oath to avenge his parents and those who fell with them on that awful night.

But the youth uttered no word to show what was in his thoughts, and the man believed that the livid look in his face was called there by fear that he really intended to kill him.

"Come, what is your business with me, now that you have me in your power?" demanded the youth once more, and his own voice in its hoarseness and intensity surprised him.

It showed how deeply he was moved, yet his manner was outwardly unmoved.

"I'll tell you jist what my biz is with yer, young feller. Yer is mighty anxious, lookin' inter ther muzzle of my revolver, but I hain't in no particular hurry, seein' as I is behind ther gun."

"I have looked into a loaded weapon before. You cannot frighten me now, if that is your object."

"Yes, I has got ther scare on yer and mean to scare yer good ter git what I want."

"What do you want?"

"I'm a poor man, and I is prospectin' fer gold just now."

"Had you asked me for gold when you came up I would have willingly helped you, but now that you show yourself a robber, you must get it as best you can."

"That's what I is going ter do."

"Go ahead!"

"See here; has yer got any money?"

"A hundred dollars or so."

"Yer has got more."

"You appear to be posted."

"I is, and yer hundred dollars don't cut no shine with me."

"What, then?"

"Your daddy was rich."

"Ah!"

"I knows that he come here from Texas, and he were well fixed, and brought a big sum of gold along with him."

"I knows, too, that yer mother brought along a great many diamonds and jewelry; and them, and yer pa's gold, were all hid away somewhar, but not in ther cabin."

"How do you know this?" asked the youth, in a hoarse whisper.

"Never mind how I knows it, but I does, and them as burned yer home and kilt yer folks didn't git ther gold and diamonds after all ther red work, for they shot yer father thinkin' yer mother would tell; but, she didn't know whar they was, and so hed ter die also, and along with 'em ther others, so thar would be none ter tell ther tale."

"But, yer see, I knows that you was told by yer father whar ther fortune is, or you did ther hidin' of it, and if you love life you hed better tell me, fer I'll do ther squar thing and go halves."

"Now, young feller, its ter be your life or that treasure, so you kin decide; and quick, too, fer I haint no man ter fool with, as I'd kill yer as I would a coyote."

"Take yer choice, now, thet gold and jewelry or your life," and the man pressed his revolver hard against the forehead of the leader of the Silver Stars.

CHAPTER IV.

A LUCKY SHOT.

Not a muscle of Bird Bainbridge's face changed at the words of the man, who had called himself Shadow Sam.

The youth recalled, even at that mo-

ment, that he had heard of a desperado in the mines about Santa Fe who bore the name of Shadow Sam.

This must be the man; but he would not cringe before him.

Would he give up the treasure of which he was accused of being in possession, or lose his life for his refusal to do so?

That seemed to be the question in the mind of the man who held his revolver against his head.

Was the youth plotting escape, in the moment that he hesitated before replying to the momentous question?

The man seemed to dread that he was, and he cast his eyes uneasily about, as though dreading trouble of some kind.

"Haint yer goin' ter answer, kid?" he roared in tones meant to terrify.

"What?"

"Is yer goin' ter give up yer secret, or lose yer life?"

"I am considering," was the cool reply.

"Yer knows, then?"

"I know where my father placed his gold and my mother's jewels, for I was with him, but I have never even thought of them until you showed your knowledge of them just now."

"Then go with me an' git them."

"I'm considering what I will do."

"Be quick about it, then."

"I must have time to think."

"I'll give you two minutes."

"It is not enough."

"Three then."

"Call it five."

"I'll go yer."

"Time me, then, for you have a watch."

"No, yer don't git me thet way, kid, fer I don't take my eyes off yer, er my revolver from agin' yer skull."

"Now go ter thinkin' what yer'll do, and I'll guess at ther time."

"How did you know of this gold and jewels?"

"Thet is none of your consarn, but mine."

"Tell me why my home was attacked and all I loved murdered, while no other ranch in this valley was raided," and the brave boy's lips quivered.

"You is talkin' now, not thinkin', and yer time are going fast."

The youth cast a glance all about him, the revolver muzzle keeping close to his head.

He could see no help near.

He could not believe that the man would kill him, thus burying the secret he wished to know in the grave with him.

So he made up his mind to risk it and refuse, being ready to strike up the revolver if the man really showed a determination to kill him.

What else he could do he did not then see.

If his young pards were only there.

If he struck up the weapon it must be a struggle for mastery, and against an armed man.

"I have decided," he said with reckless determination.

"You is wise, young feller."

"Now just lead me to ther place whar thet fortin' is hidin' away, and I'll be squar with yer."

"You! why you don't know what it is to do a fair thing, and you'd simply have me lead you there to kill me the moment you knew."

"What does yer mean?" asked the surprised robber.

"I mean that I have decided to keep my secret."

"Then you dies, and right now—no, I'll give yer a minute to say yer prayers."

"To change my mind, you mean?" and

the eyes of the young scout were upon the man to take advantage of his slightest move, or look.

He still believed he was safe, holding the secret he did, and it suddenly flashed upon him to temporize, to pretend to yield, and thus get an opening for himself to make a break of some kind in self defense.

But the enraged robber stepped quickly back a pace, sighted the revolver full at him, and cried:

"When I count three, and I counts slow, you goes ter ther bone yard, if yer don't change yer mind."

"One!"

Just as it was on the lips of the youth to change his mind to gain time, there came the crack of a rifle and a bullet struck the barrel of the leveled revolver, the blow knocking it from the hand of the robber.

In an instant, unheeding the weapon, he had wheeled, with a bound was in the saddle, for his patient horse was within five feet of him, and driving the spurs deep, as he lay low on the animal's neck, he was away at full speed, dodging about the timber, as though to protect himself from a shot.

For a second Bird Bainbridge was too astonished to move, then he cried:

"It's one of the Boys!"

Forgetting in the moment of excitement, that he had not reloaded his rifle, he sprang to where it stood leaning against the cabin, seized it, took quick aim, and—the cap snapped!

Then he realized that the weapon was unloaded, and he turned to his belt hanging near for ammunition, at the same time calling out:

"Ho, pard, who fired that shot?"

"Where are you?"

CHAPTER V. THE RESCUER.

There was no answer to the call of the youth, as to where his rescuer was, but just then he heard a shot in the timber through which the robber had gone, and he caught sight of a form on foot.

But the next it was hidden by the trees.

The flying horseman still held on, apparently unharmed by the shot, and urged his horse the faster.

But in the glance he had had of the one who fired the shot Bird Bainbridge had recognized him.

It was an Indian. Clad in buckskin, wearing a war bonnet of eagle feathers, the youth knew his rescuer as Lone Buffalo, the Redskin Hermit of the Mountains, the exiled Tonca chief who had proven himself such a good friend of the palefaces.

He saw, too, that the Indian must have run rapidly from the spot where he had fired his first shot to the place he was then in, to get another fire at the flying horseman.

"Ho, chief!" he called out, and the Tonca came at a run toward him.

"Get pony heap quick, and catch up."

"Lone Buffalo pony heap tired," called out the chief, as he came toward the cabin.

Bird took the advice without waiting for the Indian to come up, and running to the corral came back quickly, leading two of his best horses, for he always kept several penned up for use.

As he reached the cabin he saw that Lone Buffalo had run in toward a thicket some distance off, and was just reappearing with his pony, which he had left there, while he had evidently slipped along on foot, having seen the outlaw, to get a shot at him, or at least see what he intended to do.

"Catch bad paleface now, talk heap

bimeby," cried the Indian, and he threw his saddle upon one of the two horses while Bird was putting his on the other.

In an instant the two had mounted and were away on the trail of the fugitive.

Fortunately for the latter, it was nearly sunset, and he had gotten all of a mile the start, while he fled toward the mountains across the valley.

"No catch him to-night."

"Take trail after one sleep," said Lone Buffalo.

This Bird Bainbridge saw the wisdom of, though reluctant to give up the chase, and as he turned his horse back homeward, he held out his hand to the Indian and said:

"Now I can thank the Lone Buffalo, for I believe that devil had it in his heart to kill me."

"Lone Buffalo come to young brave cabin, see bad paleface go that way, take trail, leave horse and get good place to shoot."

"Then bad paleface go to kill, Lone Buffalo shoot, but no kill—that bad."

"It was a long-range shot, Buffalo, and you feared to hit me; but you knocked that revolver out of his hand, and I will keep it to remember you by—and him."

"We'll soon have supper and then talk it all over, for I am awful glad to see you."

"Lone Buffalo heap glad, too; like paleface young brave heap."

"Have talking paper for him."

"You have a letter for me?" asked Bird, in surprise.

The Indian nodded and then replied:

"Big White Chief send talking paper."

"The commandant at Fort McRae?" asked Bird, still more surprised.

"No; Big Chief White Buffalo."

"Oh! Buffalo Bill!" cried the boy, delightedly, knowing that the Lone Buffalo called the scout White Buffalo.

A nod was the answer, yet no effort was made to hand over the "talking paper," for so the redskins call a letter.

"You have seen the White Buffalo, then?"

"Me see him."

"Where?"

"Meet him on trail."

"Near here?"

"No; Santa Fe."

"Oh! you were there?"

"Lone Buffalo go sell pelts, get food, see White Buffalo."

"Have heap long talk, give me talking paper for young brave."

"Me come here to give him, soon as me go by tepee in mountain."

"Talking paper talk heap for young brave."

Bird then understood that the chief had met Buffalo Bill at Santa Fe, and had written a letter for him to bring to him.

He did not ask for it, knowing that the redskin would give it to him at the time he deemed best.

Going on to the cabin, the horses were put in the corral, the tired animal of the chief with the other two, and, building a fire, supper was put on, Bird anxious to entertain his Indian guest with the greatest hospitality.

Supper being discussed, the chief lighted his pipe, smoked awhile in silence, and then took out from an inner pocket of his buckskin hunting shirt the letter which Buffalo Bill had sent to his young pard, the captain of the Boy Scouts of the Valley.

CHAPTER VI.

BUFFALO BILL'S LETTER.

Though almost overwhelmed with curiosity to see what Buffalo Bill had written him, and which Lone Buffalo had

considered so important that he had ridden hard to deliver it, Bird Bainbridge would not commit a breach of Indian etiquette by asking for the letter, but waited without any outward show of impatience for it to be handed to him.

Opening the envelope, the youth found that the letter was dated in Santa Fe, and just one week before he received it, showing that the Indian messenger had lost no time in its delivery to him.

It was as follows:

"My dear Pard:

"I came here on Government business, and meeting our hermit friend, decided to write you by him, for he was here selling his pelts and purchasing stores."

"I also met a courier from McRae, and he informs me that the settler from your valley, Lasso Sol, whom I recognized as Black Lariat, a desperado from Colorado, is to be sent up to Fort Lyon for trial, and the colonel had written to headquarters asking if I could not be sent after him, as he vowed he would never be taken there alive, and they feared that he might escape from a regular escort."

"As the courier was to return to McRae, I reported my presence here to Colonel Tipton, and asked should I come there after the man?"

"If the answer is to come I shall leave here for McRae as soon as I complete the work that brought me to Santa Fe, and I write to ask you if you care to be my assistant in carrying the prisoner to Colorado, for you can return by the regular trail to Fort Wingate and thence home."

"I have something important to communicate to you as to your own welfare, and that of your young pards, for I do not think our work on the Little Colorado River was as thoroughly done as it might have been, and those who escaped, from certain things I know, are again plotting mischief."

"Being forewarned, you know, is being forearmed, and it is well to prevent a scene such as the valley witnessed months ago."

"If I hear from Colonel Tipton ordering me to McRae after the prisoner, I will start at once, so it will be well for you to go to the fort to meet me."

"Do as you deem best about bringing any of your pards with you."

"Hoping to be at the fort in about ten days, and there meet you, with regards to my Lads of the Lasso, as I may call you all, I remain

"Ever sincerely your friend,

"SCOUT."

The youth read this letter from Buffalo Bill over twice, so as to fully understand it, while Lone Buffalo sat calmly smoking his pipe and showing no interest in his surroundings.

Turning to the Indian, Bird said:

"Lone Buffalo had a long talk with the great white Chief?"

"Yes, heap talk."

"Does he know what this talking paper tells me to do?"

"Go to fort, meet chief, maybe be there bimeby."

"Yes, and go north with Buffalo Bill if I find him there."

"Yes."

"Does Lone Buffalo wish to go?"

"Me go if young brave wish."

"Now, Lone Buffalo, I do not know how it will be to leave the valley without a patrol, as I will do if I take my pards with me."

The Indian nodded.

"If they go with me, then I am going to ask you to do patrol duty for the valley, for you can scout around and give warning if there is danger of a raid."

"Lone Buffalo know all right."

"I am well aware that you do, Pard Redskin."

"But if I leave my pards here on patrol duty as usual, I wish you to go with me to the fort, and maybe up north with Buffalo Bill and myself."

"Lone Buffalo ready."

"Well, we'll turn in as soon as I've rounded up the cattle and horses into the corral, and in the morning the boys will be here, and we'll talk over just what we think best to do."

The Indian went with Bird to drive the cattle into the corral, which was done every night, and, this duty over, they returned to the house and sought rest, Lone Buffalo being given a buffalo robe and blankets on the floor.

Just at dawn they rose, a fire was built, breakfast eaten and as the meal was finished up dashed the other four of the Scouting Five.

They greeted their young leader with a shout, and were glad to find there the Redskin Hermit, giving him a most cordial welcome.

Having dismounted from their horses and gathered around the cabin, Bird said:

"Boys, I had a close call last night for the happy hunting grounds, but Lone Buffalo was my rescuer, and more, he brought me a letter from Buffalo Bill."

The boys gave a cheer and sang out in chorus of mingled surprise and pleasure:

"A letter from Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes; and I'll read it to you, and then we will have a pow-wow to see what is best to be done."

All gathered close about Bird, while he read aloud the scout's letter to them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POW-WOW OF THE PARDS.

Not a voice uttered a sound to break in upon the reading of Buffalo Bill's letter to Bird Bainbridge, until it was finished, and then a general demand was made that it should be read once again, that not a word should be missed.

Bird complied, and then looked around upon his four pards, the Lone Buffalo sitting in the circle and calmly smoking his pipe, the Indian way of cogitating over anything that needs deep thought.

"Buffalo Bill knows something he never wrote in that letter," said Seth Saunders, while Nick Walter added:

"Yes; he's found out something about those who escaped from us on the Little Colorado, and who are plotting mischief."

"You are right; they are looking for revenge for those we killed, and the prisoners the valley people hung after we brought them here," remarked Kane Noland.

"Well, boys, three are not like the big band we had to deal with before, and we got away with them, with the aid of Buffalo Bill and Lone Buffalo here, and they are still our friends and allies, if it comes to another fight," put in Bud Ramey.

"We have all had our say now, except you, Bird, so what do you think?" and Seth Saunders looked at their young captain, who said:

"Let me first tell you about last night, boys, and see what you think."

"You have heard of Shadow Sam?"

"The mine desperado?"

"Yes, indeed; a bad man from Bitter Creek."

"A hard citizen of the upper country."

"A tough one he is."

Such were the few replies to Bird's query, and had Shadow Sam heard them, as a border desperado he would have felt proud of his record.

"You have got the fellow down fine,

boys, and I wish to tell you that he came to see me last night."

This caused a chorus of exclamations, and all listened with deepest attention as Bird Bainbridge told the story of his unwelcome visitor and what followed, adding:

"I tell you, boys, we cannot be too careful, for had I had a loaded rifle by me, while I cleaned one, and then a half a dozen weapons, as you know, in my cabin, I could have killed that man before he got out of range."

"Too bad," was the sad comment from all.

"Now, as you have seen, Lone Buffalo saved my life, and to-day we must take the trail of Shadow Sam and see where it leads."

"Now, from what he said to me, I am convinced that he was one of the raiders who murdered my people, burned my home and then escaped on the Little Colorado."

"If so, he is a very dangerous man at large, and it is our duty to find him, and turn him over to the authorities."

A general cheer greeted these words.

"I am sure that he is not acting alone, though he came here to get that money without bringing anyone with him."

"He wished to get that alone, and chip in with the others in what else was done here in the valley."

"Find him, and we check their devil's work at the start, and Lone Buffalo says he will help us."

"Me help, yes."

"Now, here is Buffalo Bill's letter, and that says I am to meet him at Fort McRae."

"I must do so, and I am going to ask you, Seth, and Nick Walter to go with the Lone Buffalo on the trail of Shadow Sam, for no better trailers than you three could be found."

"We'll go," was the eager reply of the two boys, Lone Buffalo having already expressed his willingness to go on any duty.

"You, Bud Ramey, and Kane Noland, I wish to come here to my cabin and take up your quarters."

"We'll do it."

"One of you can ride down to the first ranch and send the warning from place to place down the valley to put all on their guard and be ready for a call if needed, telling them that strange characters have been seen, and three of our party will be away on their trail."

"This will prevent a surprise, should one be intended by this Shadow Sam, who may have a band of outlaws at his call."

"And you, Bird?" asked Seth Saunders.

"I shall go to Fort McRae, join Buffalo Bill, and go north with him, leaving you in charge, Seth, until my return."

"The scout evidently wants to see me about something of importance to us; but should I not go on to the north I will come back much sooner."

"I hope you will," was the universal expression of feeling in the matter.

"Now, boys, to take the trail from McRae northward, Buffalo Bill will doubtless go by the way of Fort Tule Rosa, over the Zuni Plateau by our rock fort where we fought the Raiders on the Little Colorado, and then on up to Fort Wingate; so if you have any important news for me, you can head us off at several places."

"Now, boys, do you fully understand the situation, and what each one is to do?"

An answer in the affirmative was given, and preparations were begun to carry out what had been decided upon.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINDING AN AMBUSH.

With the young Scouts of the Lasso, for so the people in the valley had begun to call them, to decide was to act, and in ten minutes Bud Ramey was descending down the valley to give warning at the first ranch, and have a cowboy take word on from there, and so on to the next.

Then Bud was to return and take his place at the cabin with Kane Noland.

Lone Buffalo was given a good, fresh horse in place of his own; the three youths selected the best of animals, and a complete outfit was gotten by Seth and Nick for a long trail.

Bird Bainbridge, meanwhile, had made up his outfit for a long journey, carrying a saddle roll, extra blanket, and provisions, and ample ammunition.

He, with his two pards, and Lone Buffalo, who were to go upon the trail of Shadow Sam, rode away from the cabin together.

The trail of the fugitive robber was readily found, and Lone Buffalo said that he could follow it in a gallop, if need be.

For some miles as his way lay in that direction, Bird Bainbridge went with the trailers, and halting at noon they had dinner together just where Shadow Sam had halted for the night, showing that, in his flight he had pressed on for hours after leaving the cabin where he had nearly lost his life.

It was here, too, that the young leader would have to branch away on the trail to Fort McRae.

"Be very careful, boys, that he doesn't lead you into an ambush, and if you do come up with him try and take him alive."

"Good-by, and luck to you, and don't forget where to head me off if you need me," and Bird, with a warm grasp of the hand all around, rode away on his lone trail to Fort McRae to meet Buffalo Bill.

He did not consider that there was any need for any particular haste on his part, so rode leisurely along, not caring to distress his horse at the outset, with such a long trail ahead of him.

By easy riding he knew that he could reach McRae the next afternoon.

Toward evening he began to look about for a good camping place, which meant as much for his horse as himself, for grass and water were not always found when wanted.

It was not sunset when he found the very place he wanted, and staking out his horse and getting his camp ready, while his fire was burning up, he went to the top of a hill to see what was beyond it.

The sun was just setting and the view was a grand one.

Darkness came on while he was enjoying the scene, and he turned to descend to his camp when far down in the valley his eyes fell upon a fire light.

Instantly he was all attention.

Some one was camping there, that was certain. Who could it be, for he did not know of any trail running that way, and he had followed no direct trail in coming thus far.

He expected to get into the Rio Grande River trail the next day.

Having made this discovery he decided to investigate further.

His supper could wait, as long as his horse was enjoying rest and food.

Waiting until it was really dark, and having taken in the surroundings, he began his descent to the valley.

The fire was over half a mile from where he had stood on the hill, and in

going to it he made a flank movement of more than that difference.

Reaching the valley he found a stream running through it, and heavy timber.

Up the stream a quarter of a mile he beheld the glimmer of the camp-fire.

Nearer and nearer he approached, until he saw two men seated by the fire, their horses staked out near.

But, try as he might, he could not get close enough to see who they were.

They were evidently there for the night, and so he decided to return to his camp, have supper, and then come back and see what discovery he could make.

He had made one discovery, however, that a ridge of rocks ran across the little valley, and behind these, was the camp.

He would return by way of the rocks next time, thus getting nearer to the camp, and then be able to see who the campers were.

Back to his own camp he made his way, had his supper, and with a blanket for a bed, started once more for the valley beyond the range.

He descended to the ridge, crept along it, found a perfect hiding place not a hundred feet from the fire, and begun to reconnoitre.

He found all as quiet as the grave, and a form lay near the fire, while he could see one of the horses indistinctly.

Secure in his hiding place, he decided to wait until morning, so he spread his blanket and went to sleep.

He awoke with a start, heard one of the men riding off, and saw the other remaining by the camp-fire.

Provoked at having slept like the dead, and not awakened, he gazed at the man at the fire and saw that he was carefully examining his rifle.

He still could not see his face, but as he looked the man arose and walked toward the ridge.

He soon disappeared in the darkness, but leaving his hiding place, the youth quickly followed.

But a short distance had been gone, when he heard a voice call out ahead:

"Take your place here, and we can git 'em; but thar must be more than two thet followed me."

"That is Shadow Sam's voice, and he and some pard are to lie in ambush here."

"How lucky I happened upon the trap; but now to find a hiding place where I, too, can chip into this little game."

CHAPTER IX.

BUFFALO BILL IN SANTA FE.

"Does yer see thet man over at thet table, talkin' with ther landlord?"

"I does."

"You knows him, don't yer?"

"I heerd say as how he were Buffalo Bill, ther great scout, but he haint givin' ther fact away, they tells me, and that means trouble for somebody."

"It would, if he didn't just git inter trouble."

"How does yer-mean?"

"Ther cap'n sent me ter pick four of ther gang and lay fer him when he lights out from here."

"I see."

"And you intends ter do it?"

"I obeys orders, and I tells yer right here thet he is a bad man to tackle, as I happens ter know, so I wants four men besides myself, and you is one of 'em."

"All righty, though I don't like ther job."

"Nor me; but he's down here a-lookin' around ter put his hand on some of us fellers who is spotted as having ropes about the'r necks, and the only way ter stop him is ter let him tarn up missin'."

"I see."

"He's a-going further northward, I hears, so the game is ter just hold him up when he does, fer he's not bullet proof if ther lead goes straight and hits dead centre."

"When is he going, pard?"

"To-morrow sometime, I hears, but we gits out ter-night and lays fer him at what they calls ther Death Hacienda, fer ther trail winds around three sides of its walls, and close to it, so we kin lay inside and pick him off—see?"

"Yes, it kin be done: but will he be alone?"

"He allers travels thet way."

"When do we start?"

"Afore day, and flanks around ter git thar, so he don't see our trails."

"You is sartin he is goin' that way?"

"Yes, fer a man at ther Post told me he were, and he were ter start to-morrow."

"All right, I'll come to your layout and be ready fer ther trail."

The scene was in a Mexican saloon in Santa Fe, and the scout was seated at a table over by itself quietly taking in his surroundings, while the landlord was chatting with him.

The two who held the conversation, that told of a plot to kill Buffalo Bill, were some distance from where he sat, and were typical specimens of the Santa Fe loungers, dark-faced, clad half in Mexican, half border costume, armed fully, and with the air of men who were handy with a gun.

Pretending to be square fellows, they were secretly of the outlaw clan, and for them to plan an assassination was generally to carry it out successfully.

The one who had announced himself as leader of the band of killers, soon after rose and went in search of the others whom he had decided upon for the work, and the man he had left saw him talking to one here and there, until the five picked crew had been made up.

Upon these the first one selected kept his eyes, while he wrote something on a slip of paper.

This done, he arose and passing the table where sat Buffalo Bill, now alone, for the landlord had been called away, he dropped his hat, and in picking it up, slipped the paper into the scout's hand.

Buffalo Bill showed no surprise, held the slip of paper fast, and kept his eye upon the man who had given it to him, and who passed on around the saloon.

"I have seen him somewhere before," mused the scout, and taking some papers out of his pocket he managed to read what had been written for his eye alone, apparently.

It was as follows:

"It is know'd that you is going south from here, and starts ter-morrow by ther valley trail they hain't much used."

"There is a gang o' five, me being one of them same, who is ter hide in ther old Death Hacienda, around which ther trail runs, and just pick you out o' ther saddle as yer goes by—see?"

"We starts at daybreak so as ter be thar ahead of yer, and as I hev a memory of a favor you did me onct, up in Denver, I jist tells yer ter take 'tother trail."

"Now-yer knows ther game, fer I gives it away, fer I hain't forgot thet you saved me from Vigilantes onct—see?"

This was the strange note that Buffalo Bill read, and not a change came over his face as he did so.

He eyed the man fixedly, and muttered:

"Yes, I was sure I had met him before."

"They were going to hang him, for stealing a horse, and I would not allow it, and the next day they found that he had not been the thief."

"But I guess he's a bad one, from his own admission here, and one of a band of hard citizens."

"But he is an outlaw with a memory, and I'll know him when we meet again."

Soon after the scout arose and left the saloon, going to the tavern where he was putting up while in Santa Fe.

Whatever he might think of the outlaw's letter, it did not frighten him off from carrying out his intention to go southward, for he got his traps together, and with a note to the landlord secretly left the tavern, went to the stables, mounted his horse and rode away in the darkness, unseen, taking the trail that ran by the old Death Hacienda.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE DEATH HACIENDA.

The old hacienda that had been given such an unenviable name was a spot to be dreaded, for its former dwellers had all died with the plague, and then it had become the haunt of robbers, and many a deadly scene had been enacted there.

When the trail had been changed miles to the right to avoid the dread spot, the place became no longer a haunt of outlaws, and was avoided because of its bad name in the past, and the fear that it was haunted.

But the trail that led by it cut off miles from the other one, and now and then a man would be found bold enough to even go by the hacienda at night.

Buffalo Bill had gone that same trail before, and he had twice camped in the old hacienda, so knew it well, for, interested in the ruin, he had even investigated it thoroughly.

Now he rode straight to the hacienda, led his horse to a ring he knew well, and spreading his blankets, went to sleep, undisturbed by the memories of the place or what might be before him.

He had determined upon a very bold plan, and to carry it out unaided, or take the consequences.

He awoke with the sunrise, looked to his horse, ate a cold breakfast, and then took his position to await the coming of his intended assassins.

But he had made a change in his personal appearance and dress.

His long hair was put up under a military cap, which, with an officer's uniform coat he took from his saddle bags, gave him the appearance of a soldier, for he had sword belt on also, though no sword.

This certainly changed him completely, and he would never be taken for the scout, without a very close investigation.

He knew the spot where the men would take up their ambush, was in the end of a long, narrow wing, the narrow windows of which were iron-grated, and to which there was but one entrance and exit.

Once they were in here they were as securely in a trap as rats in a wire cage, and the scout held them at his mercy as they came out.

With this advantage in his favor, knowing that there and there alone the outlaws would take their stand, to command the trail, Buffalo Bill had decided to play a lone hand in the game of life and death.

He had not very long to wait in his secure hiding place in a dark chamber to one side of the wing referred to, for he soon saw the five men coming from a different direction than that by which he had arrived, for they had flanked the place.

They rode into the plaza, dismounted, and staked out their horses to feed, for the place was overgrown with grass.

They seemed to have been detained, for they talked rapidly and hastened into the old wing, just as Buffalo Bill had taken the chances that they would do.

He had it even then in his power to mount his horse and slip away, but he was built of sterner stuff, and calmly awaited until they had arranged their positions at the windows.

Then his stern voice rang through the old mine:

"Ready platoon! kill the first man who shows himself!"

A cry of terror was heard back in the wing, and then hasty steps approaching, and again the scout spoke:

"Hold there!"

"Resist, and you shall be riddled with bullets."

"You are caught, so surrender, or I will order my men to charge in upon you."

"Say, cap'n, we hain't done nothin', we only come in here to rest," said a whining voice in the wing.

"Come out here, then, one at a time, as I call you."

"Ready, men!"

"I'm comin', cap'n, but you'll find us dead squar'; we is miners."

"That remains to be proven."

"Come on! each man as I call you!"

A man soon appeared slouching out of the wing, and he saw in the dim light of the ruin an army officer in uniform, as he supposed.

Instantly Buffalo Bill seized him, a pair of small steel manacles were slipped upon his wrists, and he was faced toward the wall, and his belt of arms taken from him.

"If he moves, sergeant, fire on him!"

Then came the call for another to come out; and in the dim light he, too, saw the uniformed figure, and supposed that a platoon of soldiers were hiding back in the dark chamber and covering him.

One by one the outlaws were called out and handcuffed, until the fifth appeared, and Buffalo Bill said aloud:

"I have no more manacles, but this lariat will do as well."

Drawing the man to one side, to where the lariat lay, he tied him, apparently with the greatest security, and whispered:

"You can free yourself, so watch your chance and skip."

"I will fire on you, but not to hit you."

The man started, saw now who his captor was, and it suddenly dawned upon him that the man he had warned had played the bold game alone to capture his intended assassins.

CHAPTER XI.

OREGON JOE!

Running a second lariat, for he had well prepared himself, through the irons of the other four prisoners, Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, come with me."

They could not but do so, for the scout had all their belts of weapons hanging on his arm, and they were helpless, manacled as they were.

"Say, Pard Cap'n, whar is yer men?" asked the man who had been the leader, and he gazed fixedly at Buffalo Bill.

The scout simply replied:

"They will be on hand when wanted."

Leading the men out into the plaza, the scout suddenly removed his military cap, his hair falling down upon his shoulders, and he faced them, a revolver in each hand.

"Buffalo Bill!"

This was the cry of all, and then the leader muttered:

"Well I be darned!"

For a moment it seemed as though the men intended to leap upon their daring captor and try conclusions with him; but he did not flinch, the revolver in each hand was leveled, and he said quietly:

"Don't try it, for I hold all the trumps!"

This settled it, for they realized that, if he had taken them single handed, he could hold his own with five men in irons.

"Wall, Buffalo Bill, what has we did?" whined the leader.

"Absolutely nothing, for you didn't get the chance."

"But you should not talk so loud when you plot in a crowd against a man's life, for what you planned was overheard and told to me, and I intend to take you to Albuquerque and give you over to the officer in command there for safe keeping, and to keep you out of mischief."

"Come, mount your horse, sir, and I'll see to it that he does not throw you."

The man muttered maledictions deep and loud upon the scout's head, but he had to obey, and he was quickly tied in his saddle.

The others followed, one by one, the "outlaw with a memory" being the last to mount, and he being placed upon the rear animal, all of which were tied, bit to bit, in single file.

This man had already realized that he was as good as free, for he saw that he could slip his hands through the lasso bonds that were about his wrists.

He saw, too, that the scout was taking dangerous chances and trusting him, for he had seen him slip his belt of arms in his blanket at the rear of his saddle, and by freeing his hands, leaning forward and untying the lariat from his bridle bit, he could wheel about at some convenient place and escape.

This was just what Buffalo Bill was planning for him to do, and showed him as much, though he was most cautious not to bring him in any way under the suspicion of his fellows.

Mounting his own horse, when all was in readiness, the scout moved out of the old hacienda, the five horses strung out in lead the length of a lariat.

The men were sullen and silent.

They had sworn until their vocabulary of oaths was exhausted, and they had nothing else to do but take their medicine quietly.

Buffalo Bill showed that he knew something of the country, for he left the trail, where he was liable to meet men of a like stripe with his prisoners, who would make him fight for their possession, and took his own course in going to Albuquerque.

He had halted for a noon rest, and dismounted, to allow the prisoners to also get off, when, suddenly, the rear horseman wheeled, drove the spurs into his horse, and laying low in his saddle dashed into the pine thicket upon one side.

Had Buffalo Bill sought to bring him down, in earnest, it would have been difficult, just then, to have done so, the pines being so thick and the scout's rifle still being slung upon his saddle-horn. Almost in a twinkling the man had disappeared.

Cody, however, had whipped out a revolver, and shot after shot was fired, while a shout came back from a distance:

"Hooray! Pard, I is off!"

The four remaining prisoners gave a wild cheer, and but for the fact that their horses were still fast to the scout's they would have made a dash for liberty, ironed though they were.

The end of the lariat which had held the rear horse had been untied from the bit, as could be seen; in fact, as they rode along the rear rider had slyly held up a hand to show his pards that he had slipped his bonds.

All the others, therefore, breathlessly awaited the climax, and were wild with joy at his success.

"Oregon Joe is a good one!"

"He's too keen for you, Buffalo Bill," observed the leader, and he laughed in his glee.

"Oh, is he? Well, as you have told me his name, I thank you. Oregon Joe can and will be hunted down."

The man saw his mistake and was silent, and instead of a halt for rest, the scout pressed on to Albuquerque with his remaining prisoners, fearful that Oregon Joe would attempt their rescue.

CHAPTER XII.

BIRD BLOCKS THE GAME.

While Buffalo Bill is carrying his prisoners, so daringly and cleverly captured, to the military post at Albuquerque, let us return to Bird Bainbridge, who, while on the trail to Fort McRae to meet the scout, had chanced upon a discovery of more importance than he then surmised.

Knowing that Shadow Sam was the man whom he had heard call out to the other one, for he had recognized his peculiar voice, it told him that he had, for some reason, changed his course and come almost parallel with the trail he had taken.

Who his comrade was he could not guess, but he must have met him by appointment, for it seemed hardly to be an accidental meeting, there in that wilderness.

As it was Shadow Sam, then Lone Buffalo, Seth Saunders, and Bud Ramey would surely come there, for they would stick to his trail.

As the man had halted there, and with a comrade, it told that he was expecting pursuit and intended to let his pursuers ride into an ambush.

Just where he had gone to conceal himself Bird Bainbridge could neither see nor know, but his comrade had taken up a position in the ridge, where he, the youth, could command him from the ridge above.

His horse was not near, being over in his little camp beyond the range, and he would therefore find a hiding place in the rocks and await developments.

This he did, and, securely hidden among the rocks, he waited for dawn to come.

He could hear the man nearest to him softly whistling, and just as dawn was breaking there came from a hundred yards away:

"Be astir, pard, fer day's comin', and they'll be along on my trail afore long, fer they hain't many miles behind."

"All right."

"Does yer think ther whole five will come, fer ef they does I says let 'em pass and lay low, fer they is more than we kin handle, as I knows 'em," called back the man not a hundred feet from where Bird was hiding.

"No, ther won't be more'n two of 'em; but if ther five comes, we kin handle 'em, fer you let 'em pass you, and we'll get 'em inter a trap whar we has got ther thing did and no danger to us."

"But sh— don't talk."

They lapsed into silence now, and the

light brightened, then the sun rose and broad daylight followed.

Bird Bainbridge lay low, for he didn't know just where Shadow Sam was.

But he could see the man below him, and he recognized him.

"Well, I declare!" he muttered, and his words and looks showed that the recognition had moved him.

Thus an hour passed, then another, and then there appeared in the distance a horseman.

It was Lone Buffalo, and his eyes were fixed upon the ground, for the trail was hard to follow just there.

Behind him a short distance came Seth Saunders and Bud Ramey, riding in single file.

The man below him raised his rifle and got ready to kill.

He seemed relieved to know there were but three.

"If he intends to show no mercy, I must not," murmured Bird Bainbridge, and he let his rifle muzzle point toward the intended assassin below him.

Just then toward the other end of the narrow chasm that split the rocky ridge in twain, he saw Shadow Sam change his position, for he had heard the fall of coming hoofs upon the rocky trail.

The sight of him nerved Bird Bainbridge to action, and feeling no longer merciful toward the men he had recognized, and seeing him run his eye along his rifle barrel, he took quick aim, his finger touched the trigger, and the shot was fired that saved the lives of his comrades.

And none too soon, for the death clutch upon the trigger caused the other leveled rifle to fire, but the bullet sped on without harm and struck in the trail ahead of the Indian Hermit.

Quickly Bird whirled then to see what had become of Shadow Sam, and saw his head just disappearing over the ridge in rapid flight.

"Ho, pard, come on!"

"Shadow Sam is in full flight."

Even Lone Buffalo showed surprise at seeing Bird Bainbridge suddenly appear before them, for they had supposed him to be far away.

But the three spurred forward into the pass, and Bird called out:

"Shadow Sam was here with a pard to ambush you."

"I got onto their racket and killed the pard, but Shadow Sam has gone, and he had his horse on the other side of the ridge, so has had a good start."

"But, boys, who do you think I have shot?"

Both of the boys expressed ignorance, and then Bird said:

"It is Reddy the Cowboy, who, with Barney, took charge of Lasso Sam's ranch when Buffalo Bill took him a prisoner to Fort McRae, recognizing him as Black Lariat, the desperado of Colorado."

CHAPTER XIII.

TOO LATE.

It was surely a surprise to Seth Saunders and Bud Ramey, as it had been to Bird Bainbridge, to learn that Reddy the Cowboy was the ally of the man who had sought the valley to kill and rob.

Reddy and Barney, two cowboys, had taken charge of Lasso Sam's little ranch and cattle after Buffalo Bill had recognized that in the latter the valley had a very dangerous settler, one whom he knew as one of the worst of desperadoes, and who, as Black Lariat, had been a terror in the northwest.

Driven away from the haunts he had spread terror through, for some reason the scout could not account for, he had

settled in Meadowland Valley and was apparently living an honest life.

But this Buffalo Bill doubted, believing he was there for some sinister purpose.

So he had made him a prisoner, and left him at McRae, whither he now had orders to go and take him back to the northwest for trial.

His two pards, the cowboys Barney and Reddy, nothing could be said against, so they had been allowed to go back to the settlement, and at Black Lariat's request—in the valley he was known as Lasso Sam—take charge of his ranch and cattle.

Now it was proven beyond doubt that Reddy was certainly in league with the man Shadow Sam, whatever his game was.

"Well, boys, while you get breakfast, I will go after my horse and bring him here, and one of you can dig a grave for Reddy, for we must bury him," said Bird.

"Yes, I suppose that will be best, as we must keep up the pursuit of Shadow Sam," said Seth Saunders.

So the Lone Buffalo was told to gather wood and make a fire, as he and the two boys had not yet had breakfast, the horses were staked out, and Seth and Bud were to relieve each other in digging a grave for Reddy.

The trail of his horse Bird took up as he left the camp, and he soon found where the two men had met, he and Shadow Sam, the day before, and gone into camp.

That they were friends before that meeting went without the saying, and Bird saw that the trail of Reddy led from the direction of the valley, showing that the man must have been somewhere near Shadow Sam when he took his flight at the shots of Lone Buffalo.

The camp was found and Bird's horse was all right, so was quickly saddled and ridden back to where the others had encamped by the ridge.

Lone Buffalo had built a fire, breakfast was being gotten by Bud Ramey, and Seth was still at work digging a grave for Reddy.

When the meal was over Reddy was buried, his grave was covered over with heavy rocks, to prevent the coyotes from tearing up the body, and then all prepared to start upon their separate trails.

With Reddy's horse in lead, Lone Buffalo and the two boys were to continue on after Shadow Sam, for his trail would not be over a couple of hours old and the more readily followed.

Bird Bainbridge was to continue on his way alone to Fort McRae, after going along with the others as long as the tracks of the fugitive did not lead him out of his way.

The trail was well marked, the horses were rested, and the party pushed on at a good pace, and it was just noon when the tracks began to branch off toward the northward, as though to make a circuit and go back in the direction of Meadowland Valley.

"We will camp for noon rest, pards, and then I will leave you; but stick to Shadow Sam's trail as long as you deem it best to do so," said Bird.

After an hour's rest the horses were again saddled, and bidding the others good-by, Bird saw them ride away once more upon the trail of Shadow Sam.

It was with a feeling of intense loneliness that the youth watched the others ride off, until they disappeared from his sight in the distance; but he shook off the sensation and then turned away in the direction in which he knew lay Fort McRae.

He had no trail to follow, but he was

too good a plainsman to care for that, and went on at a pace which he knew would not distress his horse.

Pushing on until night, he went into a lone camp, where his horse fared well with water and grass, and, tired after his loss of sleep the night before, he was soon in deep slumber.

But he was in the saddle again when day broke, and soon after struck the regular trail from the valley to the fort, arriving at the latter just at noon, and to be told by the officer of the day that Buffalo Bill had left McRae the day before with his prisoner.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MATCHLESS ANIMAL.

It was a bitter disappointment to Bird Bainbridge to learn that Buffalo Bill had been to the fort and had gone.

It fell upon him almost in the nature of a blow.

He began to count up the days since the scout had written him his letter from Santa Fe, and saw that Lone Buffalo had gone by his own retreat, which had doubtless taken off several days, then he had not started from the valley until the day after he received the communication, had ridden slowly, had been again delayed on the trail by the meeting of Reddy and Shadow Sam, and all this had taken time.

Then the officer told him, to his relief, that Buffalo Bill had left word that, from orders found at Fort McRae, he had left sooner than he had expected, and not feeling assured that he, Bird Bainbridge, had gotten his letter in time, or, doing so, could come to the fort, he had, after only a short delay, started upon his return.

The youth was glad to know also that the scout had left word that if he did arrive within half a day after his departure, to tell him to come on after him, but not to think of doing so if he had been gone for a longer time.

"When did he go, sir?" Bird asked the officer, quickly.

"Yesterday."

"At what time, please, sir?"

"Just after dinner."

"Then he has had twenty-four hours' start of me?"

"Yes; far too long a start for you to think of going after him."

"Who was with him, sir?"

"That devilish prisoner, Black Lariat."

"No one else?"

"No; the colonel offered Cody an escort, but he refused one."

"Are there any horses in the fort for sale, sir?"

"Oh, yes; the trader has a number."

"I mean good ones."

"He has an animal that is a wonder, but too high-priced, or he could have sold him a hundred times over."

"Will you kindly direct me how to find the trader, sir?"

The officer sent a soldier with the youth, muttering as the latter rode away:

"That youth has a most daring face, and I believe he is going to try and catch Cody."

The trader was found and asked about the horse of which the officer of the day had spoken.

"I've got him, yes, and there's none better on this border."

"He's the fastest of 'em all, and, what's more, he can keep a canter up all day long."

"I'll take him."

"I guess not."

"Why?"

"He's the highest piece of horseflesh I ever had to sell; but I know what he can do, and he cost me big money, and it takes big money to buy him."

"What do you call big money, sir?"

"A cool five hundred, and not a peso less."

"I have two hundred with me, and will give you an order on the trader of Meadowland Valley for the remainder."

The trader shook his head.

"I will leave my horse also with you, and he's a fine animal, but a little jaded."

"A good beast, worth a hundred, maybe."

"This youth is a friend of Buffalo Bill, Martin, and came here to meet the scout, so I think intends to overtake him," and the officer of the day stopped as he was passing the trader's.

"Ah, Captain Conrad, a friend of Buffalo Bill, is he? Then he's square, I guess, for the money."

"My name is Burr Bainbridge, but I am called Bird by my pards, and I'm captain of the Lasso Lads of the Silver Star, as they call us, sir, the Valley Patrol."

"Oh-ho! I have heard of you."

"It was your family that was wiped out some months ago by raiders, and Buffalo Bill helped you to avenge them."

"Yes, sir," was the quiet reply.

"Give me the order on your trader, then, for you are good for the money any time, and don't cramp yourself by giving me all your cash."

"I'll make the order for four hundred, sir, and ask you to keep my horse for me, and pay you one hundred in cash."

"That suits me."

"Come see the horse; I call him Wonder."

Bird Bainbridge was a perfect judge of horseflesh, and his eyes beamed with delight as he set them upon the horse.

He was a clean-limbed, long-bodied animal, built for speed and endurance, and had a kindly face, yet was full of spirit.

"I'll show you his tricks, young man, for he's trained, and if he disappoints you bring him back and get your money."

"He'll do, and now I must be off, for I am anxious to overtake Buffalo Bill."

"I'll be glad if you do, for he went off alone with about the worst piece of humanity to be found in New Mexico, but come and have dinner with me, and then I'll fix you up all right for your ride."

Bird accepted the invitation of the trader, and an hour after rode away from the fort in pursuit of Buffalo Bill and his prisoner.

CHAPTER XV.

ON BUFFALO BILL'S TRAIL.

Bird Bainbridge left the fort fully equipped for the task of overtaking Buffalo Bill.

He believed, as the scout might expect his coming, that he would not push along fast the first day.

Wonder he found indeed a wonderful animal, as easy as a cradle, and with a gait that would place many a long mile behind him in a day and not distress horse or rider.

The trader had looked to the youth's comfort in everything, and fitted him out with a couple of rubber blankets, two serapes, the best of provisions, and as much ammunition as he would need for a very long trail.

Then Bird's eyes had fastened upon a repeating rifle which the trader had for sale, and he had quickly bought it.

Wonder, therefore, carried a very fair load, yet no more than he would had his rider been a large man, and besides the animal was of good size and did not seem to care for the load he bore.

On, on he went at the same tireless pace.

The fort sunk from sight far behind, and the trail was now toward the northwest, leaving the Mimbres Mountains on the left, and with Fort Tule Rosa the objective point ahead.

The trail was a distinct one, though not often traveled: but the tracks of the scout's horse were plainly visible.

There were the tracks of three horses—one ridden by Buffalo Bill, another by the prisoner, Black Lariat, and the third a pack animal, for the scout had gone well prepared for a long trail and in case of a breakdown or accident to one of the horses.

As he neared the Mimbres Mountains, Bird Bainbridge felt that he would find that the scout had camped there the night before.

But as he had left the fort about the same time of day that the scout and his prisoner had, and was riding all of a third faster, while he intended to push on into the night, until the trail was no longer visible, he felt that he would be gaining at a pace that would bring him very well up to him when the sun next went down.

As he entered the foothills of the mountains the youth began to look for the spot where the scout had camped the night before.

But on he went, the camp not appearing, and the sun was drawing near the mountain horizon.

The trail ran through the foothills, and then around the northern end of the range, and the youth was wondering whether the scout had not camped but had pushed on across the plain, when he saw a stream ahead winding through some timber.

"If I don't find his camp there, then he pushed on through the night to Tule Rosa, unless there is some camp-ground in the plain; and I do not believe there is."

"If he did push on, I'll do the same, giving Wonder his rein and leaving it to him to go right."

So mused Bird as he rode along, and his eyes were roving all about to find any indication of where the scout had camped, if he had done so.

Suddenly there came trotting around a bend in the trail, a pack horse.

"What! is he coming back?" cried the youth, and he rode ahead more rapidly, to discover that the long stake rope of the pack animal was dragging along the trail.

Swinging his lasso, the youth caught the horse as he was about to bound away and brought him to a sudden halt.

"It is surely Buffalo Bill's pack horse," said Bird.

"The trader told me his pack horse was a roan."

"Can he have gotten away from him at last night's camp, and the scout could not find him?"

"I reckon so, for the horse was making his way back to the fort again."

With the pack horse in lead, now, and the animal did not seem to relish having been captured and turned back, Bird Bainbridge once more started upon his way.

He was a trifle anxious now as to what had happened, as he could not just understand how the scout had allowed his pack horse to escape from him.

The sun was now not over an hour high, and having ridden along at a brisk pace, Bird knew that he would soon be out of the range and upon the plain.

He intended, when he came to the

end of the range, to climb to some height and sweep his glass over the plain to see if he could discover the scout coming back after his horse.

With this intention, he pushed on the more rapidly, and was going at a gallop, the pack horse following; when he rounded the point of a hill and drew rein with sudden quickness, for in the trail, not fifty feet from him, stood a man with rifle-raised.

But one glance was sufficient to reveal that the man was Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

"Buffalo Bill!"

"My boy pard!"

Such were the exclamations from the youth and the scout as the two came face to face.

There stood Buffalo Bill, as though he expected to greet a foe, for his rifle was ready for action.

The youth had reined his horse back, as though not at first sight recognizing the scout.

But a second look brought a cry of surprise from his lips.

"My God, Mr. Cody, what has happened?"

As he uttered the words he threw himself from his saddle and advanced quickly toward Buffalo Bill.

And no wonder that he asked the question, for the scout was hardly recognizable.

From head to foot he was covered with dust, and his face and hands were stained with blood.

Then, too, his face was haggard, bruised and cut.

His rifle and revolver also seemed to have been in the dirt, and the scout's appearance indicated that he had met with some dire misfortune.

"Oh, sir, what has been the matter?" cried Bird, anxiously.

"I look like a wreck, don't I?"

"But take me to the creek back on the trail—I must have water."

"I cannot walk; so aid me to mount."

The voice of Buffalo Bill was dry and hardly audible.

Quickly the youth led up his horse and with some difficulty aided him into the saddle.

Then he led the way to the stream, back half a mile on the trail.

He left the trail, too, and rode up a glen, where they would be safe and more comfortable.

Quickly he took the blankets and made a bed, then aided the scout to dismount, and gave him a tin cup of water from the stream.

Then he bathed the dirt from his face and hands and was glad to see that the cuts and bruises were not severe.

"I'll soon have you all right again, sir."

"Just lie down here, and as soon as I have staked the horses out, I'll gather some wood and make a fire."

"Then we'll have some supper."

Not a word had he asked the scout as to his mishap.

Like an Indian, he could patiently wait to hear.

He saw that Buffalo Bill was suffering and about used up, that one leg seemed badly hurt, for he limped badly, and he seemed scarcely able to stand.

Taking a flask of liquor from his saddle pocket, he gave the scout a swallow, then led him to the bed he had made and aided him to lie down upon it, drawing off his coat and boots, the latter causing him to wince with pain.

Then he got some stakes and stretched one of the rubber blankets he had gotten from the trader at the Post, over the

top, as a shelter from the heavy night dew.

Nearby he pitched his own camp, put the horses up the glen where the grass was good, and brought back wood for the fire.

He was anxious to get all done before darkness should set in.

Then he could hear the strange story which he felt sure Buffalo Bill would have to tell.

In his saddle pocket he had plaster, bandages, some arnica, and liniment, and he had had experience enough with wounds to know that he could doctor Buffalo Bill's injuries fairly well if there were no bones broken.

He saw that the scout seemed almost dazed, as though he was completely used up.

He appeared hardly able to move, and was utterly worn out—so much so that the moment he had sunk upon the nice bed that Bird had spread for him, he sunk into a deep sleep.

To the youth it was such a deep slumber that it seemed to be almost unconsciousness from other causes than sleep.

In a thicket nearby Bird had placed the pack saddle, and intended to build the fire, and thither he took the wood.

He congratulated himself upon having gotten thus far along before night set in, for the sun was just setting.

Putting the armful of wood down, he thought he would first take another look at the scout, as he felt anxious about him.

Approaching noiselessly over the fine straw, he had nearly reached the little shelter where Buffalo Bill lay, prone upon his back, his hands lying limp upon either side, his eyes closed, and breathing heavily as though suffering, when his eyes suddenly fell upon the figure of a man.

There, standing a dozen paces from the scout and gazing upon him, while he rested upon a long-barreled rifle, was a man of rough appearance.

So absorbed was he in viewing the prostrate scout that he had neither seen nor heard the approach of the youth, who, in his turn, was utterly amazed at what he saw.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DANGEROUS VISITOR.

The man who so unexpectedly had put in an appearance in the little camp was a character, to judge by appearances.

He was dressed in Indian tanned buckskin, red in hue, forming hunting shirt and leggings, and wore a slouch hat much the worse for wear.

He had leggings of rawhide coming nearly up to his knees, and stout shoes for mountain climbing.

A long rifle and shotgun combined, with a knife and two revolvers, the three last weapons stuck in a row on his left side, in holsters made in his hunting shirt, for he wore no belt, completed his equipment.

Upon the stock of the gun was cut a number of cross lines, at first appearing as though done for rude ornamentation with a pen knife, but a closer inspection revealed the fact that each mark was separate from the others, and some of them were colored white, others red, the latter being in the majority by more than double.

The man's face was tanned to the hue of parchment, his beard scraggy, and like his hair, unkempt, while altogether the make-up of the individual was peculiar and by no means assuring.

But there he stood, with no show of hostility, gazing at the prostrate scout,

who really appeared to be dead rather than sleeping.

Terrified at his boldly entering the camp, and not turning at the noise of his approach, Bird Bainbridge drew a revolver and suddenly sprung between him and the scout, while he cried warmly:

"Ho, pard! I run this layout; so what's your game?"

The stranger slightly started, as he beheld the youth, seemingly for the first time, suspecting his presence there, yet still kept his position, his left arm resting on the muzzle of the long rifle, his right hand grasping the barrel, and his body slightly bent forward.

He gazed upon Bird with a look of curiosity, quietly taking him in from head to foot.

The boy was slightly disconcerted. He had expected the man would show fight, or at least speak out at once.

He did neither.

"Who are you?" asked the youth.

Still no answer.

"I ask again, who are you?" angrily repeated the boy.

"Speakin' ter me, sonny?" was then answered in the deepest of voices.

"I was speaking to you, of course!"

"What's tho racket?"

"Hey?"

"Who are you, I asked?"

"Hey?" and the man started to step forward, his hand up to his ear.

"Stand back! Stay where you are!" menacingly.

"Scared, eh?"

"Not scared, but I don't like your looks."

"Hey?"

"Are you deaf, or putting it on?"

"Yes, certainly."

Then Bird began to think. He remembered that the man had betrayed no sign of hearing his approach, so must really be deaf.

It was recalled to him, also, that he had heard of a strange character known as Deaf Dan and who was a noted Indian killer—an outlaw, who roamed the trails alone, and seemed to kill from real love of taking life.

If this was Deaf Dan the youth knew that he had a very dangerous man to deal with and one who was as cunning as a fox and malignant as a snake.

One thing, however, reassured the boy. If it was Deaf Dan the outlaw, he never had company with him, was always alone, so that he only had one man to deal with, and thus far he had the advantage over him.

Stepping nearer to him, but still with revolver in hand, the youth said sternly:

"I asked who you are, and deaf or not you've got to answer, or I'll encourage your hearing with clipping a piece off your ear with a bullet."

Bird had spoken in an ordinary tone, but his eyes were fixed upon the face of the man, and he saw the slight start he gave and the malignant look that came into his eyes, and he felt sure that he had heard what he said.

"Hey?" and the man put his hand up to his ear.

"Who are you?"

"Yes, don't keer ef I do, fer I'm hungry and I don't fly by night, not bein' a owl," and the man, again moved toward Bird.

But the boy covered him with his revolver.

Instantly the man halted, a look of surprise upon his face, as he called out:

"Is yer goin' ter feed me on bullets?"

Bird was in a fix, that was certain.

The man did not show any sign of hostility, and yet he was not one to trust.

But what to do Bird did not know.

He believed the man to be Deaf Dan the outlaw, and there was a price on his head if so.

But he did not care to fire on him when he offered no resistance, and yet he would not allow him to get any advantage over him if he could help doing so.

There stood the man, apparently surprised, and with an innocent expression upon his face, as though he did not understand why the boy covered him with his revolver.

Suddenly there flashed into the mind of the young scout a plan to try him further, and he said, as though addressing a comrade behind the stranger, and in a low voice:

"You watch him Seth, while I get supper."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RIDE FOR HELP.

With the words of Bird Bainbridge, making believe to address a companion standing behind the dangerous visitor, the latter quickly turned his head to look.

The trick of the youth was successful. It proved that the man was not deaf, whatever might be his other defects.

If he was playing deaf, it was for a purpose, and Bird intended to take no chances; so he acted promptly.

As has been said, he did not wish to kill the man, whoever he might be or what his motive there.

But there lay Buffalo Bill to be cared for.

Some great misfortune had happened to the scout: that was beyond doubt.

His prisoner had escaped; he was bruised and ill, and on foot.

Thus had he been met by Bird, and trying to overtake the pack horse which had in some way escaped.

Night was coming on, and here was this dangerous visitor to deal with.

So the youth acted promptly and in a way that showed he was in deadly earnest, for he had no time to stand palavering with a man who might only be watching a chance to get the upper hand.

If he was the outlaw known as Deaf Dan, then it would be a favor to humanity to rid the country of him.

As the stranger turned his head, at Bird's words, to look behind him for the supposed comrade, quick as lightning the youth raised his revolver, took quick aim at the edge of the ear thrown in profile, and the report came.

The man uttered a yell as the bullet clipped a piece out of his ear, but quickly came the words:

"Hands up, there, or I'll do more than mark you for life!"

"Down with that gun, and up with those claws!"

The voice of the boy rang, and the order was obeyed.

The gun was dropped, but not without a quick movement of the foot that cocked both barrels, the rifle and shotgun, and the muzzle was pointed to fall toward the youth and two explosions were heard as the weapon fell.

But the man had not dropped the muzzle exactly right, or the movement of his foot, as he touched the trigger of the gun in falling, had twisted it, for the bullet and a load of buckshot tore by the head of the young scout.

Not in the least disconcerted by the act which he had seen and the close call from death, with a bound Bird was be-

fore the man, and his eyes ablaze, his voice quivering with anger, he shouted:

"Hands up, quick!"

Up they went.

Instantly the weapons stuck in the hunting shirt were taken out and thrown to one side, with one hand, while Bird forced the muzzle of his revolver hard against the head of the man.

"Down on your knees, quick!"

The order was obeyed with alacrity, for the man was thoroughly scared now, and he could hear, too.

"Put your hands behind you!"

It was done.

"Drop over on your face!"

This was done.

Within a few paces of the youth lay the coiled lasso of Buffalo Bill.

It was picked up by the youth, and when he had finished tying his prisoner there was not the slightest danger of his escape.

Dragging him over near the spot where he intended to build his fire, the youth left him lying where he could be in the full glare of the light.

Then he went to have a look at the scout.

He lay as before, breathing now quietly, although sleeping peacefully.

But why had he not awakened at the two shots fired and the sound of his voice, wondered the youth.

But he set to work and built his fire, got supper and then tried to arouse the scout.

He could barely get a few muttered words from him.

Bird was alarmed and put on his thinking cap.

Then he sprang to his feet, hastily put his saddle upon the pack animal, then tied the prisoner more securely and made him fast to a tree, put some large logs on the fire, and leaping upon the horse was off like the wind.

It was a long, hard ride to the fort, but that pack horse, a good animal, too, did not get a minute's rest on the way.

"I can get another pack animal to ride back in place of this one: but I must get a surgeon to Mr. Cody with all speed," muttered the brave boy.

So, on, on he went through the darkness, and just before midnight he dashed up to the fort.

Colonel Tipton was still up, received the youth, whose coming to the fort that morning he had heard of, listened to his story, and half an hour after a surgeon and cavalry escort, with an ambulance following, to take the scout back to the fort, was on the way to the lone camp in the Mimbres Mountains.

And Bird Bainbridge led the way as guide, mounted upon a fleet horse he had gotten in exchange for the pack animal, and leading an extra one along for the prisoner.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRISONER KNOWN.

At such a clipping pace did Bird Bainbridge lead the way the ambulance was left miles behind, and pretty well fagged out the horses halted at the little camp just at dawn.

There was an officer along in charge of the cavalry escort, and the surgeon, with one of the fort scouts, and as they dismounted they found all as the youth had left it.

The scout appeared to still be sleeping soundly, the prisoner was securely bound to a tree, and the fire was burning well.

"By ther Rockles, but how are you, Deaf Dan?" said Scout Bernard, as his eyes fell upon the prisoner.

A scowl and silence was the only sign

the prisoner gave, and turning to the youth Scout Bernard said:

"Young feller, you've done what many a man has tried to do and slipped up, captured Deaf Dan, the worst brute on this or any other border.

"I've got a bullet in my thigh now that he put there, and he's one who killed redskins and whites just to kill, and he kept a record of it, too.

"Some said he was an avenger, others that he was crazy, but whatever motive he might have for killing Indians, he certainly took the lives of white people only for booty for he robbed them all, and women was the same to him as men, for it was his pleasure to kill.

"Why, the Governor of the Territory has offered a big price for his head, and you get it."

"I don't want it, for I do not need money, and if I did would not accept pay for a man's life, no matter how bad he was.

"But I am glad he is safe now: but why do you call him Deaf Dan?"

"He's deaf as a post."

"He is not, for he puts it on, as he can hear as well as I can," and Bird told the story of his capture to the interested scout and soldiers, the lieutenant in charge remarking:

"Well, Bainbridge, you have made a most clever capture, that is certain, and it will not take Colonel Tipton long to have his fate settled when we get him back to the fort.

"But, come; let us see how Cody is?"

The surgeon was seated by the side of the scout as the lieutenant and Bird approached, and both were glad to see that Buffalo Bill was awake and was talking.

"Ho, pard, you were the one who saved me. I remember now: but I can only recall that you came up and brought me here.

"I was suffering, so I took some morphine I had in my pocket, and must have overdosed myself, for I have been dead to the world all night; but, Surgeon Jenifer says no bones are broken and I am only bruised and cut up a little."

The scout held out his hand to the youth, who grasped it warmly, and said:

"I found you on the side of the trail and seemingly half unconscious, Mr. Cody. I had just caught your pack horse, which was trotting on ahead, his stake rope dragging."

"Yes, the scamp kept just ahead of me, and, limping as I could, and with my head splitting open, and every bone aching, I could not catch up with him.

"At last I determined to take that morphine and find a place to rest, believing I would feel all right after a sleep, for I had been two days and nights in the saddle.

"So you came on after me, did you, pard?"

"Well, if you had not done so it would have been good-by, Buffalo Bill, for dead to the world as I was, the coyotes would have jumped me; but I am better now, for I'm hungry."

The lieutenant called out to his sergeant to get breakfast with all dispatch, and the surgeon set to work to dress the cuts and bruises that Buffalo Bill had received on face, hands, and body.

He suffered most with his right leg, which he was very lame in, but Surgeon Jenifer said no bones were broken; it was only bruised as though from a heavy fall.

"You can ride back to the fort, Cody, in the ambulance which is coming, and in a few days you will be all right."

"Thank you, Surgeon Jenifer, but I am not going that way."

"Which way?"

"To the fort."

"Why not?"

"I must push on along my trail."

"You are not able to do so."

"Oh, yes sir, I am. I'm a hard nut to crack, and it is not easy to kill me, or cripple me so that I cannot ride."

"But, you certainly do not expect to take the saddle in your present condition?"

"Yes, sir, for I'll be all right after a few hours."

"But where are you going?"

"On the trail I was following when I met with my mishap."

"And that you have not told us of."

"I have not been just in condition to do so before; but, who is that ugly-mugged pilgrim you have got tied over yonder?"

"They call him Deaf Dan, sir. He came to our camp last night and I took him in," quietly explained Bird.

"Yes, you captured the worst desperado in this country, and whom no one else dared attempt," cried Lieutenant Carter with enthusiasm.

"It wasn't so very hard to do, sir," was the youth's smiling reply.

CHAPTER XX.

BUFFALO BILL'S STORY.

Buffalo Bill smiled admiringly upon the young Valley Scout, as he modestly told how he had captured the Terror of the Rio Grande, as Deaf Dan was often called, and then said:

"It looked easy from the way you have told it, boy pard, to have entrapped Deaf Dan; but I have heard much of the man and his deeds, and know that he was one of those human monstrosities who killed from sheer love of taking life.

"Why, I have heard of his killing those he deemed his friends, and his assumption of being deaf shows that it was done to entrap the unwary, while the way he dropped his gun, exploding it while pointed toward you, showed the bold game he played to escape capture.

"No, you have done all that can be said in your favor for this exploit, as well as for saving me, as you did."

"You have not yet told us from what I saved you," Bird smilingly reminded, giving the scout a hint that he would like to know just how it was he found him seated by the trail side, hurt, half dazed, afoot and unable to tell how it happened that he was in such a plight.

"True, I have not told you of my adventure, have I?"

All replied in the negative, and added that they would much like to know what had happened.

"I suppose you know I left the fort with a prisoner, Black Lariat?"

"Yes."

"The orders I received at McRae, which I found awaiting me, told me to hurry right through with my prisoner, and that is why I did not wait longer, for you, boy pard, for your being here shows that the Lone Buffalo gave you my letter."

"Yes, sir, and I left as soon after as I could do so, but was detained on the trail."

"You were in time, I see, after what you have done."

"But, I pulled out of the fort without having had any rest, which I needed, as meeting a courier on the trail at Albuquerque, he told me that there were dispatches for me at McRae, so I rode through without rest."

"Just your style, Cody," said the lieutenant.

"Yes, and your fatigue, loss of sleep, injuries, and the morphine downed you completely," the surgeon remarked.

"Well, I was nearly gone, I guess.

"But I did not know how important the dispatches were, so pushed ahead, as I have said.

"I had just had a hard time of it with some prisoners I captured at an old hacienda, and whom I got wind of as going there to ambush me.

"I simply turned the tables on them, and left them at the military post, with the charge of intended assassination against them, and general cussedness.

"I had decided to push on to Fort Tule Rosa, where I could take a rest, with my prisoner not on my mind, but under guard, so left this range behind me, and was going ahead with no idea of danger, some dozen miles out on the plain, when out of a thicket of mesquite came a number of shots.

"Why I was not killed I cannot tell you, for one bullet went by my face, another just missed my head, passing through my hat—there is the hole—while a third cut my collar here, as you see, and another pattered against the big buckle of my belt.

"That shot knocked the breath out of me and I went down with my horse, and fell heavily, but he struggled up, I clinging to the saddle, though the fall hurt me, and rearing, he fell back on me, dead.

"If you can tell me who shot at me, and why and wherefore, I will feel infinitely obliged, for whoever it was came out of that mesquite thicket like mad and went charging away in pursuit of my prisoner.

"Mind you, he had not been fired on, I do not think, and he was riding some twenty feet behind me. I had the end of the lariat leading his horse, and the pack animal, fastened to my saddle horn.

"That lariat was cut by a bullet also, so his horse was free, though he had manacles upon his hands, and was bound to his saddle as well.

"But, off went his horse, and after him the murderer who darted out of the mesquites, after firing on me.

"I was completely upset in more ways than one, and I hustled to get myself free from my dead horse—a no easy task, for I was shaken up badly and hurt, as you see, and for awhile I feared my leg was broken.

"But, after a great struggle, I got out, and started toward the pack animal, to put my outfit upon him, when he dragged backward and the lariat slipped off the hem of my saddle and away he went, back on the trail.

"I was then in a fix, for I could hardly walk; yet, expecting these devils back, all the time, I limped along after the pack animal, but when I would get near to him he would trot off.

"I never put in such a walk in my life, I assure you, and I expected all the time to be pursued and have to fight it out.

"As the horse had now gone on out of sight, I concluded it best to get off the trail, for day was near at hand, and find a hiding place in case my enemies should come back.

"I found a place, a little break in the plain: but my canteen had been crushed, so I had no water, and when the sun rose I suffered such torments that I at last began to limp along toward this range.

"It took me all day long to hobble to the ridge, and then I saw that pack horse and tried again to catch him.

"But you found me just then, boy pard, and so I'm still in the ring."

Buffalo Bill held his hand out and warmly grasped that of the youth, just as the sergeant announced that breakfast was ready.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE PRISONER'S TRAIL.

The ambulance arrived soon after breakfast, but Buffalo Bill declared that he had no need for one—that he could get along all right, when again in the saddle; and he made up his mind to start within half an hour, riding the extra horse the youth had brought with him.

As his own saddle and bridle had been left upon his dead horse, with the rest of his outfit, the lieutenant said:

"I shall go on to the spot where you were ambushed, Cody; so ride at least that far in the ambulance, for I wish to see what the trails show as to the force there, and which way your prisoner went."

"I'll go in the ambulance with pleasure that far, lieutenant, but it will be hard to follow a single trail over that desert soil, sir," was the reply.

So the scout was made comfortable in the ambulance, the surgeon riding with him, and the prisoner was mounted upon his horse, the whole party then taking the trail to the scene of the ambush, a dozen miles away.

It was not noon when they came to the mesquite thicket, and the tracks there showed that seven horses had been concealed in the thicket.

That the men in ambush knew Buffalo Bill was to pass that spot, with Black Lariat as a prisoner, there was no doubt; and that they had rescued the ruffian was certain: but, why had they not returned to see the scout, dead or alive, and to get the pack horse?

That question no one could answer.

Buffalo Bill's dead horse was still there, though half devoured by coyotes, but the saddle and bridle were all right, greatly to the scout's satisfaction. These were transferred to the pack horse, the other led animal being saddled with the pack, as being best fitted for it.

After a noon meal, as the scout's experience in the ambulance convinced the surgeon that his patient could go on his way in the saddle, though not without suffering, he felt assured, he mounted, and with Bird Bainbridge as his companion, started on his way, taking up the faint trail of the escaped prisoner and his rescuers.

"I will report to the colonel, Cody, and he will send out search parties for your prisoner, and you can have others go out from Tule Rosa and Wingate, and he may be retaken," said the lieutenant, and with a cheer from the cavalry for the scout and his boy pard, the detachment took the back trail to McRae.

Buffalo Bill noted that the horsemen who had charged out of the mesquite thicket, started straight away upon the trail of the man who had escaped him, so he said:

"We must get our thinking caps on, Bird, and see what we can make out of this puzzle."

"Yes, sir, we'll find out all about it, but you let me do the hard work and you keep as quiet as possible. You are not ready for hard riding yet. Few men could be up with the injuries you are suffering from."

"I'm all right, thank you, boy pard.

"But, to begin with: six men were in that thicket as Bernard the scout found out for me, and indications go to show he said, that they had been there a

day or so. Of course they were Black Lariat's rescuers, and their aim was to kill me."

"There is no doubt of that, sir."

"But, I don't understand why they did not come back to see if their work was well done; nor do I comprehend just why Black Lariat and I were so readily distinguished from each other in the dark."

"It does seem strange, sir."

"As I read the signs they are outlaws; he is their leader, and they have been hanging about for a chance to rescue him since he has been a prisoner at the fort.

"They must be the remnant of the band we so nearly wiped out upon the Little Colorado, with such others of the gang as were not along on that trail. If so, I feel sure that Black Lariat is the leader."

"Oh, Mr. Cody!"

"I know you regarded him as an honest settler, in your valley, but he was there for a purpose.

"At the time of the raid you recall how he wanted to make me out a renegade, and followed me with two comrades, cowboys in your settlement, to do away with me, but with Lone Buffalo's aid I was too much for them, and so made Black Lariat a prisoner.

"To take him to the northwest means sure death to him, as he well knows, so he had to make his escape, and in doing so my life was sought.

"They rescued him, but he went off with my manacles upon him, and as I am still above ground I shall go on the hunt for his scalp."

"And I will be with you, sir. But let me tell you that we will be headed off, either at Tule Rosa, or the Little Colorado, by Lone Buffalo and two of my boy pards. These three will make a strong team, yet I can send to the valley and get the other two from my ranch, if you think best."

"Your Five Stars, Lone Buffalo, and myself will be all we need, Bird, if indeed the chief and the two with him will not be enough; but, what are they to head you off for?"

"I'll tell you what they are doing, Mr. Cody," and the youth then gave an account of Shadow Sam's visit to him and of what had followed.

"I have heard of that fellow. He is a bad one, and telling me what you do reminds me that I have something to tell you."

"Yes, you so wrote me."

"It is just this: I feel sure that the blow struck by those raiders was aimed at your father alone, and his family and home."

"Do you know, Mr. Cody, I have had that same thought?"

"Well, you ought to be best able to determine that. Can you say if it was not from a feeling of hatred some one felt against your father, some act or wrong to avenge, not from any thing he might have done since living here, against any one, but before he came here?"

"Could he not have been followed here by some one who sought his life and to ruin his family?"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STORY OF A LIFE FEUD.

As Buffalo Bill asked the question he scanned the face of Bird Bainbridge as though to read his inmost thoughts.

The two were riding side by side, the pack horse trotting along behind.

That the scout was suffering pain the youth felt assured, but he would not show it, and was determined to stick to

his resolve to track down the escaped prisoner and his rescuers.

The face of the youth was a study as the scout scrutinized it, and Cody could see that something was disturbing the boy's usual serenity of manner.

The scout said nothing more, but let the boy take his own time in answering.

At last Bird spoke:

"Mr. Cody, I reckon you are right. It was not alone to raid our home, but to seek revenge as well, and I feel now that I know who did the work of revenge."

"Yes, boy pard."

"You see, it was an old-standing feud between my father's family and one other, and I will tell you the truth about it."

"My father married my mother against the wishes of her people. He then was poor, and she was rich and her parents wanted my mother to marry a young man of wealth."

"Then, too, there was another reason: my father had killed my mother's brother in a duel forced upon him."

"I got the whole sad story from my mother, for my father would never speak of it."

"She did not blame my father, knowing that the duel was planned, purposely to kill him, and she then ran off and married him."

"They were pursued by my mother's father, accompanied by the young man whom mother's parents wished her to marry, and also by his father."

"At the crossing of a river my father was overtaken and brought to bay. They then intended to kill him, and only when forced to do so, did he take life."

"On the defence, he wounded my mother's father and the young man, but killed the father of the latter."

"He then escaped and came to Texas, where he established a home, and prospered."

"By the death of the old gentleman he had been forced to kill, and the wounding of his son, it came out that they were bankrupt, and only waiting to get my mother's wealth by marriage."

"The young man had to run off, or go to prison, and he developed into a very bad man, and laid at my father's door the acts he committed."

"Once in Texas he met my father in the town near his home and a street duel followed."

"My father was a dead shot, but did not wish to kill him, so wounded him."

"A year after, our home was attacked one night by masked men; but my father fought them off, and they fled, leaving several dead behind them."

"During the fight my mother recognized our old enemy."

"Again my father was ambushed on his way home one night, but escaped being killed."

"Then mother insisted that we should move far away."

"Her property her father would not give up, but father had prospered; so he sold out, and we moved to the home they destroyed."

"Yes, I feel now you are right—that our old foe tracked us there and sought to wipe out the whole family: but he did not do so, for *I still live*."

There was a world of meaning in the way the youth uttered the last few words of his sad story.

He had told all in a low, distinct tone, and Buffalo Bill's idea that revenge, not plunder altogether, was at the bottom of that night raid upon the Bainbridge ranch in Meadowland Valley, now needed no further proof.

"Do you know the man who has

proven your bitter foe?" asked the scout.

"No, sir, I can hardly say that I do, though I saw him once, the day of my father's street duel with him, in Texas, for I was there."

"You think you could recognize him?" "He was a tall man, flashily dressed, for he was a gambler, and wore his hair long and a moustache."

"I saw his eyes, and I would know them, it seems to me. And more: he has a finger off his right hand, cut off by my father's shot at the ferry the day I told you of, and—oh, Mr. Cody! *I know the man!*" suddenly cried the boy excitedly.

"You know him?"

"Yes, sir, I know him!"

"What was his name?"

"Samuel Spencer: but his face, his eyes come back to me now, and I wondered then where I had seen him before."

"When and where did you see him last, boy pard?"

"I saw him last in the night, but heard his voice, for I could not see his face, and I recognized it as that of the man who came to my cabin and tried to kill and rob me."

"The one you called Shadow Sam?"

"Yes, sir, the same. He has changed much since that day in Texas, seven years ago; he has grown thin, his face is cadaverous, in spite of the beard, and he dresses roughly; but his eyes are the same and the forefinger of his right hand is gone."

"And he is the man on whose trail Lone Buffalo and your two pards started?"

"Yes, sir."

"May they catch him is my most earnest wish."

"No, I wish to hunt that man down myself, and I will, some day! I pray Heaven that they did not catch him. But see! Yonder are some horsemen coming after us, and at a gallop."

The scout turned painfully in the saddle, then halted his horse and looking back, his eye, as powerful as a field glass, recognized the three horsemen at once, for he said:

"They are our friends, the Indian Hermit, Seth Saunders, and Bud Ramey."

"How lucky!"

Bird Bainbridge took off his sombrero and waved it, and the salute was answered by the three horsemen, who were now seen to have two led horses along.

"Yes, they lead a pack horse, and also the animal belonging to Reddy—yes, I recognize them now!" cried the youth, joyously.

CHAPTER XXIII. ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

Assured that the horsemen far back on the trail were their pards, Buffalo Bill and Bird awaited their advance, and as they came up each party greeted the other with a cheer, followed by a grasp of the hand all around.

"Why, Seth, what are you doing on this trail?" asked Bird as they were all grouped together.

"Still following Shadow Sam, Bird."

"Then you have not caught him, I am glad to hear?"

"Glad to hear?"

"Yes, because I know who he is now, and I wish to capture him myself."

"So his trail came this way, did it?"

"Yes, we have not seen him since you left us, but Lone Buffalo could follow a snake's trail over a rock, and he has never lost it."

"We tracked him to a mesquite thicket some miles back, and there found coyotes

about a dead horse, and the mark of wheels, and of many hoofs. As you must have come that way you doubtless know what they all mean," said young Saunders.

"Yes, we do know, for I had there about the closest call of my life: the dead horse was mine, poor fellow, and I, too, would have been food for coyotes if it had not been for your brave young captain here."

"But, you say the trail of this Shadow Sam led to the mesquite thicket, Seth?" queried Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, sir, and halted there for some time; then it left the thicket along with the tracks of half a dozen more horses, and we are following the big trail now, as you also seem to be."

"When those fellows left the mesquites, they went in a hurry, as their tracks showed, and they were not going at a slow pace here, either."

"But still other hoof marks we have noticed besides yours on this trail."

"You read signs well, Seth," complimented Buffalo Bill, and then he continued:

"Yes, there is the track of a horse ridden by Black Lariat, whom I had as a prisoner, and who escaped when I was fired upon."

"That man, Shadow Sam, and the six men in the mesquites make eight desperate fellows to fight, but I do not think they are too many for us to tackle."

"No, indeed, sir! for with you as leader I would not back down from a large gang of them."

"So say I!" added Bud Ramey.

"Me go; White Buffalo say so," put in the Indian Hermit.

"I would be glad to have our other two boys with us, for their own sakes," remarked Bird.

"That would make it too dead easy for us, Bird," and all laughed at Seth's reply, while Buffalo Bill rejoined:

"You know they are doing good service where they are."

"My idea is that this band of outlaws has a retreat over on the San Francisco somewhere in the southern end of the Tule Rosa Range, and that they have gone there."

"With the exception, possibly, of a man or two at the retreat, those we are following doubtless make up the complete number."

"They will make for their retreat, thinking they have killed me, and lie low for awhile, though why they did not come back to see if I was really dead is a mystery yet to be explained."

"We may find it hard work to follow their trail to their retreat, but the Lone Buffalo can do it, if I cannot, or we all can together discover it, no matter how they cover it up, for you three boys are dandy trailers, as I have reason to know."

"If we surprise them we gain a big advantage, and, as it is, we are five, and they will not be over two to one, at any rate, against us. We have all fought greater odds."

"Now, pards, we'll follow this trail to the end. Take it slow, and be ready for what comes our way, for I am getting better rapidly, and after a night's rest will be like a new man."

The Lone Buffalo seemed pleased at the scout's plan; the three boys gave a cheer, and the party moved forward once more, with the led horses, forming quite a cavalcade.

They were nearing the southern end of the Tule Rosa Range, with the San Francisco River dead ahead of them, but some miles distant, when the scout said:

"Look yonder!"

All eyes turned in the direction indicated and saw three horsemen just coming into view over the rise of a distant hill, and evidently following on the direct trail from Fort Tule Rosa toward the northern end of the range and Fort McRae.

Had not the scout's eyes been sweeping around the country, as they always did when he was upon the trail, the three horsemen would not have been discerned, for they went out of view almost immediately.

"We must know who those fellows are, boys; so you, Bird, go with Saunders and Lone Buffalo and round them up, while Ramey and I wait for you here," the scout ordered.

The three darted away, and were seen to disappear over the rise where the three horsemen had vanished.

A quarter of an hour passed and then they came over the rise again, but not alone; the three horsemen and their pack-horse which they had gone after were with them.

As they came nearer Bud Ramey called out:

"Mr. Cody, I know them!"

"Who are they, Bud?"

"Our boy pards, Nick Walter and Kane Noland, are two, but I don't just make out the third."

"Now we are fixed for a fight, and no mistake!" cried the youth, enthusiastically, while Buffalo Bill seemed well pleased at this addition to his force.

As they drew nearer Bud Ramey said:

"I know the other man now—it is Barney, the cowboy, who, with Reddy, had charge of Lasso Sam's ranch—why, they have got him tied!" and the boy spoke with great surprise at the discovery he had made.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VALUABLE PRISONER.

The party soon came up to where Buffalo Bill was resting on a blanket spread upon the ground, and it was then seen that Bud Ramey was right, for Kane Noland and Nick Walters were the horsemen, while Barney, the cowboy, and pard of the slain Reddy, was along, but bound securely to his saddle.

Explanations rapidly followed, to the effect that Kane Noland had seen a strange man meet Barney in the valley, and go with him to his cabin.

The cautious young scout had followed, for he felt sure that he recognized in the man one who had been conspicuous among the raiders in the fight on the Little Colorado and who was one of the three who had there made their escape.

Creeping up to the cabin, Kane had plainly heard what they were talking about, and was astounded to discover that both Barney and Reddy, the cowboys, were secret members of the band of raiders, as Lasso Sam had been; in fact, they spoke of the latter as their lieutenant, while Shadow Sam was mentioned as their chief.

Noland also heard the stranger tell Barney that Reddy had gone to a certain place—where, the listener could not quite make out—having met the chief, Shadow Sam, and then had been sent there to await him, while he had been told to come and tell him, Barney, to lull all suspicion in the settlement, for another raid was to be made in a couple of weeks upon the valley.

The stranger then stated that the chief had told him Buffalo Bill was going to Fort McRae to get Black Lariat and run him north, where he would be hanged, and that he, the chief, was going to get the men, the whole band, to head off the

scout and rescue the prisoner somewhere on the trail near the Mimbres Range between there and Tule Rosa.

Kane Noland felt that he had heard enough, so he slipped away, and, going in all haste to Bird's ranch, had told his pard, Nick Walters.

They had at once planned to capture Barney and the stranger, but were too late to get both, the latter having gone.

But they held up Barney, put several settlers on their guard, got a couple of cowboys to go to Bird's ranch, and then started to head off Buffalo Bill and their pard before they could be entrapped.

Striking for the trail south of Tule Rosa, they hoped to have been ahead of the outlaws, and to meet Buffalo Bill and Bird with their prisoner, but had been too late to give the warning.

"Well, boy pards, you have done nobly and found us; so now we are all ready for the band of cutthroats," announced Buffalo Bill.

"What will we do with Barney, sir?" asked Kane.

"He is an elephant upon our hands," remarked Nick Walters.

"Oh, no; we'll gag him, and if he gives us any trouble we'll try him right on the trail and find a tree to hang him on," was the scout's order of exercise, at which Barney seemed scared half out of his wits.

"You must know, sir," continued the scout, "that your pard in crime, Reddy, is already dead, having been shot for his treachery, and Deaf Dan the Desperado is a prisoner at Fort McRae, while your chief, Shadow Sam, whose identity we know, is now with his band in their secret retreat upon the San Francisco and in the Tule Rosa Range."

It was a guess by Buffalo Bill, but all saw that Barney's face revealed surprise and added alarm at the supposed knowledge of the raiders' retreat.

"Black Lariat," went on the scout, "escaped from me, and he is also in the retreat, along with the six other members of the band, and the one or two who are left in charge."

"You see, I know."

"Blamed ef yer don't," assented Barney, unguardedly.

"That leaves ten men for us to fight, and we are seven; but I'll guarantee that this time it will be a wipe-out more complete than it was upon the Little Colorado, while when Deaf Dan is hanged this country will be pretty well freed of your stripe of cutthroats."

"Deaf Dan didn't belong to our band," growled Barney.

"Thanks for the information. I knew that he played a lone hand, yet is none the less guilty."

"I don't believe he is a prisoner, for he was a man never to say die."

"He hasn't said die yet, but he will, for he's got the rope fever; but he was captured by our young pard Bird, here, and as cleverly as ever a capture was made."

"You have, unintentionally, it is true, just admitted your being a member of the band of Shadow Sam, and I've got just one word to say to you."

"What's that?"

"Talk!"

"How do yer mean, Buffalo Bill?"

"Reddy, your pard, is dead; the testimony of Kane Noland will hang you, even if you had not betrayed yourself; Deaf Dan is a prisoner and will soon hang, and we seven are hot on the trail of your pards, every one of whom will be hanged if not killed, while you will be kept for the latter fate, unless you talk."

"What on 'arth can I talk about?"

"We do not care to lose time following this trail, but want a guide, and one who knows all we desire to find out."

"We wish to attack the camp by night, to catch the cutthroats in a trap, and you are just the man to guide us there, and tell us all we do not know."

"What's it worth?" eagerly asked the prisoner.

"Your neck."

The significant reply turned the face of the man to a corpse-like hue, but he said: "They'd kill me ef they know'd it."

"It will be our duty to see that there will be no one capable of killing you when we get done with the band."

"I'll do it, blamed ef I don't, fer my neck is worth more ter me than their lives is."

"I'll go yer on ther trade, Buffalo Bill."

"Then we'll move on, and you ride in our midst, so that no harm will come to you, for we think a great deal of your life just now, and wouldn't have anything happen to you for a gold mine."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BETRAYER.

It was just nearing sunset when the party of outlaw-hunters found a pleasant camping place upon the banks of a small stream winding through a pretty little valley in the Tule Rosa Range.

The San Francisco River was some miles distant, and in the range near were wild fastnesses where an army of cavalry could find a hiding place.

The grass in the little vale was luscious, and the horses were more than satisfied with it and the rest they were allowed.

A bivouac was made under some trees, Bird Bainbridge insisting that the scout was an invalid and fitting up for him a snug shelter.

The camp was pitched off the trail they had been following, and was well hidden.

But a single guard was kept to prevent surprise, and Lone Buffalo insisted that he should stand the night watch unrelieved.

Supper was prepared, and it was a good one, Barney the cowboy, with the prospects ahead, enjoying it as much as the others.

His conscience did not trouble him in the least; only his fear of being killed by the companions he intended to betray, or of being hanged by the scout's party if he failed them, troubled his mind.

After supper the scout told Bird to bring Barney to where he lay upon his blankets, smoking his pipe and resting. A bath in the stream had greatly refreshed him, and Bird had dressed his cuts and bruises afresh with arnica. The scout declared that the pain was rapidly leaving him.

Barney the cowboy was brought before the scout as he had requested, and, telling Bird to sit down also by the prisoner, Buffalo Bill fixed his piercing eyes upon the outlaw and said:

"See here, Barney, if you know anything about me you must be well aware that I will stand no trifling."

"So I has heard."

"We have made a kind of a bargain, but I wish to know more, and if you are wise you will tell all you know."

"When we go to the camp of the outlaws, guided by you, I shall black up your face, and otherwise disguise you, so that you will not be shot as a traitor from being recognized."

"That's square."

"But you must take some chances, and when we have been guided to the retreat you are free to go your way."

"You can have your own and your pard Reddy's horses and weapons, and Kane Noland told me that you have several hundred dollars in money; so you are pretty well fixed for a man who has put his neck in a noose."

"I hain't sayin' a word."

"You are wise."

"With a couple of horses, weapons, a good outfit, and provisions, you will be well off, and my advice to you is to make tracks rapidly, pushing the breeze for Texas, Mexico, or wherever you wish to go; only remember, if you are found in this country again, or I catch you anywhere on the border, north or south, you shall hang."

"I hain't no fool."

"No; I think you have a streak of good sense in your make-up."

"Now, you know just what you are to do, and I am ready to hear you answer questions, and I do not intend to ask any a second time, or have to try the pumping process on you, for if you can't remember, I'll simply gag you and take my own way and time of getting to that retreat."

"I'm going to talk, and don't want ter be choked off."

"See that you are not, then."

"What yer want ter know?"

"How many men are in the band now?"

"Jist ten, not counting me."

"Shadow Sam is the chief?"

"Yes."

"And Black Lariat, whom you all call Lasso Sam, is the under officer?"

"Yes."

"Do the men all stay at the retreat?"

"No."

"Go on."

"One is a spy at Fort McRae, another at Tule Rosa, a third at Wingate, a fourth at Albuquerque, and me and Reddy was in the Meadowland Valley, as you know."

"Six accounted for, thus far."

"Then there was Black Lariat and Shadow Sam, and they was our officers."

"Black Lariat war in ther valley as a settler, as you knows, and Shadow Sam war a-roving about anywhere ter pick up news, and he would git ther men ter-gether when they was wanted."

"So far you account for but eight of you."

"Well, I fergot ter say one war at Santa Fe as a spy, and t'others stays in ther retreat, ter keep ther cattle thar, and ter go as messenger when ther chief wants 'em to."

"Then every man is now in the camp, save Reddy and yourself?"

"Yes."

"And Deaf Dan is not one of the band?"

"He hain't, fer he goes it alone; but he knows whar ther retreat is, and sometimes showed up thar, and also come ter see us up in ther valley."

"Then if we find those ten men in the retreat, we wipe out Shadow Sam's entire band?"

"Yer does, 'ceptin' me, and I hain't going it bad no more, for I've got clean scared off."

"Now tell me if Shadow Sam led the former raid upon the valley?"

"Ther one ag'in ther Bainbridge ranch?"

"Yes."

"He did."

"Who planned it?"

"He did, and Black Lariat helped him."

"Was Black Lariat in the raid?"

"He was not, nor was Reddy and me, for we was playin' honest settlers then."

"I see."

"Why did Shadow Sam raid that ranch?"

"Well, he had a hate ag'in Mr. Bainbridge and his whole layout."

"Yer see, they thought they'd find Bird there at home, too, and make a clean thing of it, for we didn't know he was off with ther boys on a scout."

"So he sought to avenge himself upon Mr. Bainbridge?"

"He did."

"And he and his inhuman brutes showed no mercy."

"They didn't a little bit."

"Was not Shadow Sam after plunder, too?"

"You bet he was, for he said Settler Bainbridge hed dead oodles of gold hid away, and his wife hed diamonds and fine jewelry to throw to ther birds."

"But they didn't get the booty?"

"No, and it were a bad thing all around, fer Shadow Sam only got his revenge, and you all tracked them to ther retreat in the Little Colorado and jist scalped ther life out of all but Shadow Sam and two pards—me, Reddy, and Black Lariat, being safe in ther valley."

"Well, Barney, I believe you have told the whole truth, and when you guide us to the retreat, you are free," said the scout.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WIPE OUT.

The next morning a terrible norther was blowing, and only the fact that the little camp was well sheltered in a canyon, saved men and horses from suffering severely.

For three days the norther continued, and Buffalo Bill felt no anxiety about the outlaws, knowing well that neither man nor beast would dare face the rude chill blasts of that storm.

Then, too, the scout felt that the delay was aiding him, for his bruises were no longer painful, his cuts were healing, and he could walk fairly well upon his injured leg.

"I'll feel all right for the fray," he said on the afternoon of the third day.

Toward sunset the storm blew over, a good supper was disposed of, and all mounted, now with Buffalo Bill in the lead with Barney by his side.

As night came on the moon rose and lighted their way.

But, Barney showed that he knew the trail well, and made no mistake, arriving at the river before midnight.

Into the stream he led the way, then up it for quite a distance, and next turned off into a rocky canyon that could only be reached by the way he had come.

Up the canyon half a mile it widened into a basin, timbered, well watered and with a fine sward of grass.

It was an ideal spot for a secret camp.

Across the canyon near the stream a rude fence of saplings had been run. It served to keep in a large number of horses that could be seen feeding there.

Dismounting, Buffalo Bill said:

"You have kept your word, Barney, and I will keep mine. Lone Buffalo will unbind you now, and let you ride away, as soon as we move upon the retreat."

"There are cabins there?"

"Yes, two—a small one where Shadow Sam sleeps when here, and the other is fer ther men."

"They are all asleep now, but do you know any sign by which I can call them out?"

"Yes; knock twice, and call Shadow Sam, as though the men wanted him."

"They keeps no guard, and you'll git 'em all like rats in a trap as they runs out."

"Good-by all, fer I wants ter git away and not be seen."

It was a cold farewell and no thanks that the traitor outlaw received, and mounting one horse and leading another he rode down the canyon and disappeared.

Waiting until dawn was at hand, Buffalo Bill then led the way to the cabins.

He and Bird went to the smaller cabin, the rest to the larger one, and all stood with revolvers ready while Buffalo Bill knocked twice and said in a low tone:

"Come out, chief, fer suthin' is wrong."

The door flew open, a minute after, and there appeared Shadow Sam, and behind him was Black Lariat.

"Hands up, both of you!" sternly commanded the scout.

The two desperadoes sought to use their weapons, but—crack! crack! and each man dropped dead, Shadow Sam falling by the hand of Bird Bainbridge, who thus avenged his own.

The shots aroused the men in the larger cabin, and they came rushing out in terror, several to drop dead in the rapid fire that followed at close quarters, others to throw down their weapons and cry for mercy.

But, among the dead were Lone Buffalo—the Hermit Redskin and Bud Ramey; so that the victory was a dearly bought one.

Only four prisoners were taken, and counting the outlaw dead, the young Boy Patrol heard Buffalo Bill say in terse tones:

"All present or accounted for. The band had been utterly wiped out *this time*."

"Bravo, for my Boy Patrol!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

Lone Buffalo and Bud Ramey were given burial there in the canyon, apart from the outlaw dead, and their graves were marked, while Bird Bainbridge carved skillfully upon a large tree their names and a tribute to their memory.

A couple of days were passed in the canyon, collecting the booty; the cabins were then burned and pack animals laden down with the plunder.

Half a hundred fine animals were found in the little basin, and with these driven ahead, and the pack animals in lead, the scout and his young outlaw-hunters started upon the trail for Tule Rosa.

Their arrival the next day at the fort was greeted with wild cheers, and when the story was told the whole party were lauded to the skies, while the commandant said:

"It is just like you, Buffalo Bill, to get what you go for, whether you lead scouts, soldiers, Indians, or boys."

"My boy pards deserve the praise, not I, major," was the modest reply, and Buffalo Bill said that he would go by the valley with his young pards.

He had found out from the prisoners that he had been supposed to have been riddled with bullets, and one of the men raising the cry that soldiers were following him, they had all gone off after Black Lariat with a rush, and had not dared return to the spot.

Black Lariat's irons had been filed off in the retreat, and he and Shadow Sam were planning for an attack on Meadowland Valley to capture Bird Bainbridge and force from him by torture where his parents' gold and jewels were hidden, so the "wipe-out" had been just in time.

Accompanying the Boy Patrol to the valley, Bird asked Buffalo Bill to go with him to the place of the hidden treasure, and when it was taken out the boy forced the scout to accept a ring from him as a

souvenir, and one that had belonged to his mother, and which the scout has to this day.

After a couple of days spent in the valley with the boys, Buffalo Bill started northward, mounted upon Wonder, which Bird had forced him to accept, under pain of never speaking to the Boy Patrol again if he refused.

Soon after his arrival at the fort in the northwest Buffalo Bill heard that the four prisoners of Shadow Sam's band had been duly tried and executed, and he felt gratified that he had aided in freeing the country from such a scourge, for Deaf Dan had also been hanged at Fort McRae about the same time.

As for the Boy Patrol, they rendered good service and to-day does Bird Bainbridge live upon his ranch, a very wealthy man, and possessing a fine home and thousands of cattle, while all who know him love and respect him as a hero who justly won the title.

THE END.

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